MARSHAL FERDINAND FOCH

A. HILLIARD ATTERIDGE

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MARSHAL FERDINAND FOCH

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HIS LIFE AND HIS THEORY OF MODERN WAR

BY

A. HILLIARD ATTERIDGE

WITH EIGHT MAPS

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CHAPTER I

FIRST YEARS AND EDUCATION

FERDINAND FOCH, Marshal of France and Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies, is one of the soldiers who have won a lasting place in the annals of war in the world wide conflict of our time. Few among the war leaders have achieved such eminent distinction. In this clash of armed nations, with armies of millions in the field, it has been exceptionally difficult for any man to win for himself world wide recognition as a master of war, a recognition accepted not only by his own people but by their Allies, not only by those he has led to victory but by those against whom he fought.

During the long war, hundreds of good soldiers have found themselves in high command as leaders of army groups, armies and army corps in the various theatres of war. In the stern test of war under new and peculiarly exacting conditions, some have lost the reputation acquired in earlier days. A large number of generals on both sides have shown themselves thoroughly competent and resourceful leaders of men. They have—each in his own place in the far-flung battle line—conducted operations of importance and commanded in actions which in earlier wars would have been counted as great battles; but so far as public recognition of their merit is concerned they have not emerged from the huge number

of leaders engaged in the conflict. Their names are no more known, beyond the narrow circle of expert students of war, than the names of the average competent battalion commanders in the smaller wars of the past. Not a few have displayed powers of command that would have won them a high reputation in earlier days. Some—and their number is not a large one—have won a place on the roll of the world's great war leaders. But even among these Ferdinand Foch stands out as a leader of supreme excellence.

At the outset of the war he held a subordinate command. From its first days his rise to fame began. He showed himself a trusty leader of men alike in the days of trial and disaster and in those of hard won success. Indeed the highest tribute to his character and his qualities as a war leader is the fact that, again and again, it was at moments when the outlook for France seemed darkest that he was called upon to take control of important operations and that finally it was when disaster threatened the whole Allied cause on the Western Front that all the Allied Nations joined in committing their fortunes to his strong hands, and entrusting their future to his guidance.

And he has owed his rise to this supreme position entirely to merit. It was the result of a life-long preparation for the task thus entrusted to him. He had never sought to conciliate the favour of politicians or courted the influence of men in power. On the contrary, in his fidelity to the religious convictions that have been the inspiration of his life he had taken a course that was if anything calculated to provoke their hostility, and which certainly delayed his promotion to high rank and seemed likely to be an obstacle to his ever receiving an import-

ant command. In an age of self-advertisement, when so many hold that if a man means to succeed he must push himself into the limelight of press publicity Foch never for a moment thought about the easy ways of bringing his name before the public and the political world, or even about acquiring a reputation for military insight among the chiefs of the French army. He never posed as a central figure at public functions; he was never interviewed by the press; he made no use of the professional reviews to bring his name before military readers. He never published a line until his chiefs suggested the publication of his lectures at the Staff College. From the day when he received his first commission he was a hard-working student of war, patiently preparing himself to do his duty when the opportunity came, and meanwhile content to put all his energies into the work assigned to him. Success in the career of arms is not always associated with high personal character or with this modest pursuit of duty for its own sake. In the case of Foch, the great soldier is also a man whose whole life has been inspired by the highest ideals.

In the life story of most successful soldiers we have a long record of war services before they are at last given the opportunity of showing what they can do as generals in high command. But Ferdinand Foch saw active service for the first time at the age of sixty-three in the early days of the Great War. In the years of peace before the world-wide crisis of 1914 his name was known only to his comrades of the French army and to a few serious students of military literature in other countries. His reputation within this limited circle depended on two books in which he had summed up his teaching on war in the French Staff College. Those

who knew these books recognized in them the hand of a master.

But there is still in many minds a lingering prejudice against the soldier who without personal experience of the grim realities of war wins at his desk and in the lecture room a reputation for military science. They may not go so far as Shakespeare's *Iago* in his denunciation of Michael Cassio as a mere master of

> "the bookish theoric,
> Wherein the togéd consuls can propose
> As masterly as he; mere prattle without practice."

But the confidence of peoples and governments is more readily given to the soldier who has a long record of campaigning though he may never have written a line of theoretical exposition of his methods. It is said of such a leader that he has the really useful knowledge that comes of practical experience, that he is no "theorist" and that after all practice is worth more than theory. But talk of this kind leaves out of account the fact that, valuable as experience is, even the longest life of active service does not by itself give the wide and deep knowledge of the possibilities of war that can be gathered from scientific study based upon military history, which collects into one focus the experience of the world's greatest war leaders. The most marvellous soldier of them all—Napoleon—was himself throughout his career a student of the wars of the past and no despiser of the "bookish theoric." Moltke before his three victorious wars had seen active service only in one unsuccessful campaign with a Turkish army, and had been under fire only for a couple of hours in the defeat of Nisib on the Euphrates. He prepared for his years of victory by the study of the past. It was Moltke

who told the despisers of theory that though it was true that there was a wide gap between theoretical knowledge and successful practice, it was no less true that there was a vast abyss between ignorance and action.

Ferdinand Foch was one of the new school of French soldiers who recognized the overwhelming importance of a sound theory of war as the first condition of military success, and who set themselves to popularize in the French army the knowledge of war to be derived chiefly from two sources—the study of Napoleon's campaigns and the frank and fearless examination of the causes that had led to the success of Germany and the disasters of France in the war of 1870-71.

Such study must be based on facts; and the necessary materials were supplied by the painstaking work of the historical section of the French General Staff during the years that saw the production of detailed records of the wars of Napoleon and the admirable French official history of the war of 1870-71, a history remarkable for the clear-sighted impartiality with which it marshals the facts, and the candour with which the full meed of praise is given to German leadership and the weakness of the French direction of the war is exposed. Making full use of these facts and of the rich store of material provided by recent German military literature, students of war like Bonnal, Langlois and Colin, had done good work in the development of theory. Foch broke new ground and gave to the French doctrine of war the stamp of his own mentality. Clear in his vision of the facts, equally clear in his exposition and in drawing sound practical conclusions from them, he was a model teacher. Then, after having inspired so many of his comrades with his ideas, it was his good fortune to

find the opportunity of doing splendid service to his country and her allies, and to show that he was no mere theorist but could apply in the field the lessons he had taught so well in the lecture room and in his writings.

To know such a man one must not only follow the story of his career and of his exploits in the field, but also learn something of his teaching.

Foch does not sound like a purely French name. Indeed, it rather suggests as its place of origin that borderland of the Vosges and the Rhine which has given so many good soldiers to France—not in the east but in the south, a region that was once an independent kingdom with territories on both sides of the Pyrenees, now parcelled out into Spanish provinces and French departments. The Gascony of France and the Vascongadas of Spain have produced many world-famous men. In the fighting days of the Republic and the First Empire, Gascony gave the French army a Murat, a Bessières and a Marbot. Joffre comes from that southern land, as also does that other good soldier, De Castelnau. The home of the Foch* family is among the foothills of the Pyrenees, on the upper Garonne, where the river is a mountain stream winding among wooded hills. Here, in 1780, the grandfather of the general invested part of his profits as a wool merchant in land and built himself a house at the village of Valentine near the town of St. Gaudens. Possessing neither the wealth nor the claim to nobility that might have made the days of the Revolution a danger to him, the stormy time brought no trouble to his home, and under the Empire

* In the south of France the name is pronounced with a hard guttural ending. In Paris and the north it is usually softened into "Fōsh." The name is said to have in the Basque lands the meaning of "fire."

he was a prosperous man devoted to the new order of things and rejoicing in the victories that for awhile made France under Napoleon the mistress of half Europe. To his son born in those days of triumph he gave the name of Napoleon.

Amongst his friends in the days of the Restoration was a soldier of the Empire, Colonel Dupré, who had fought with distinction in the Spanish wars and on his retirement from the army after the fall of Napoleon, settled at St. Gaudens. His daughter, Sophie Dupré, married Napoleon Foch. These were the parents of Ferdinand Foch.

Napoleon Foch entered the French civil service, and in 1851 was stationed at Tarbes in the Hautes Pyrenées as secretary to the prefecture of the department, when on October 2nd, his son Ferdinand was born. He was the third child of the marriage. The eldest was a daughter, now living in the old home of the family at Valentine. Then came a son, Gabriel Foch, now a lawyer at Tarbes. The third son, Germain, is now a priest, the Jesuit Père Foch.*

Within a few weeks of the birth of Ferdinand Foch came the news of the *coup d'état* of December, 1851, and a year later the revival of the Empire under Napoleon III, bringing with it a promise of peace and internal order. Considering what were the family traditions one is not surprised at finding that M. Napoleon Foch of Tarbes welcomed the change and from the first gave his allegiance to the new government. But he seems never to have been a keen politician. He sought no special favours from the new régime, but was content to retain his employment under

* Germain Foch, the youngest of the three brothers, was born in 1854; and entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1872.

it. Year after year he fulfilled routine duties, first at the Tarbes prefecture, later as an official in the revenue department. Promotion came slowly, and he never held any high office or reached the centre of administration at Paris. From time to time he was moved from one part of France to another, and the result was that his son Ferdinand's education was of a rather exceptional character. He passed through several schools in the course of a few years. Devoted to his sons, Napoleon Foch disliked the idea of sending them away to a pensionnat or boarding-school. At each change of residence he took the boys with him. Their education was carried on in the home circle as well as in the class-rooms of the local day school.

The first of these schools was the old college of Tarbes, where Ferdinand spent two years in 1862 and 1863. The holidays were always passed at the country house at Valentine. Here for some weeks in the summer the boys and their sister lived an open-air life in the pleasant hill country. A favourite excursion was to the Bout du Puig, a bold summit locally famous for its shrine of Our Lady, from which there is a wide prospect northwards over the upper valley of the Garonne, while southwards the view is bounded by the Main ridges of the Pyrenees.

The school days at Tarbes came to an end when Napoleon Foch was transferred from the prefecture to the post of "Payeur du Tresor," or superintendent of public disbursements at Polignac. Ferdinand attended a local day school, and then came a move to Rodez in the Aveyron and another new school. He made no record of any special intention in these first years.*

* At Tarbes, though he won no prizes, he obtained the "accessit" or "honourable mention" for religious knowledge, Latin, history, and geography.

We only know that he showed a marked capacity for mathematical work and was a great reader. Instead of juvenile fiction and tales of imaginary adventure, he plodded through solid military histories written for older readers. At twelve years of age he had read through all the volumes of Thiers' *History of the Consulate and the Empire,* the last volume of which had appeared in 1860. The book is not very sound or critical history, but for the Frenchmen of the time it was the popular epic of Napoleon. It celebrates the glories of the great soldier and the prowess of France. But it is anything but bright reading, and the boy who made it his favourite book so early in life must have been of a decidedly studious disposition. Probably it helped to decide his future career. We may guess that he passed lightly over the political chapters, but revelled in the battle stories, from the cannonade by the mill of Valmy to the last charge of the Old Guard at Waterloo. If he dreamed of future battles in which he would some day play a part, his wildest imagination could not suggest that he was himself to command greater armies than had ever followed the eagles of his hero.

In 1867 there came another change. His father was moved from Rodez to act as percepteur or receiver of the revenue at St. Étienne, near Lyons, and the boy became a pupil at the Jesuit college of St. Michel. Here he prepared for his successful examination for the baccalaureat—the university degree that marks the conclusion of a young Frenchman's general education, after which, if he pursues his studies further, specialization begins.

Foch had already decided to enter the army, and his

aptitude for scientific and mathematical studies suggested that he should make the artillery his special branch of the service. In France the École Polytechnique at Paris is the usual centre of preliminary studies for the artillery and the engineers, including those who intend to enter the civil service of the State as well as the engineer officers of the army. But though some of the students are destined for civilian life, the organization and discipline of the school are essentially military. One of its proud traditions is that when Paris made its brief stand against the Allied armies in 1814, the students of the Polytechnique manned the guns of some of the improvised batteries. Artillery and engineer officers are commissioned directly from the school. Admission to it is obtained by passing a stiff examination in which higher mathematics plays a larger part. To make ready for this test, Ferdinand Foch was sent to a special class at the Jesuit college of St. Clement at Metz.

In these later years of the Second Empire the Jesuit colleges in France had been remarkably successful in preparing candidates for the military examinations. After the war of 1870-71, the college of the Rue de Sevres was able to set up in one of its halls on a series of marble tablets its Roll of Honour inscribed with the names of more than six hundred of its former pupils who had fallen sword in hand as officers of the imperial army and of the new levies raised by Gambetta. St. Clement at Metz stood only second to the Paris college as a training centre for the army. It was a large establishment with several hundred students. A number of these were boarders, but most of them were day scholars from the city and from many places within

easy reach by railway. Foch joined the internat, or resident side of the college early in 1870, and thus found himself for the first time living away from home. His professors in the army class were Père Saussier who had been in earlier years an officer of the French navy, and Père Lacouture a distinguished mathematician. Metz was an interesting place for the future soldier—a frontier fortress with a large garrison and an army of workmen busy on the new defences. Since 1866 there had been a growing tension in the relations of France and Prussia; rumours of the "inevitable war" for the Rhine frontier were in the air. The students of the military class would look forward to the probability of seeing active service as soon as they had won their commissions. In France there was absolute faith in the forecast that when the war came it would be fought out on the Rhine and in Germany—that it would be a victorious march on Berlin. There were a few thoughtful men who had their doubts; but such scepticism was regarded as unpatriotic pessimism. For the vast majority of Frenchmen it was impossible to imagine that the army which had conquered at Sebastopol and on the battlefields of Italy could fall before the "Prussian militia."

In the summer of 1870, young Foch went home to St. Étienne. He had won the college prize for good conduct; bestowed not by the decision of the professors but by the votes of his fellow students. He expected to return to his studies at St. Clement in August. But July 19th brought the declaration of war, long expected but nevertheless coming as a surprise. For at the beginning of this third week of July it seemed that the crisis would receive a peaceful solution, thanks to the

withdrawal of the Hohenzollern candidature for the Spanish crown. But then the political horizon darkened again, as the Emperor's government rashly sought to improve the advantage won, by putting forward new demands for the future. Then came the story of the angry scene between King William and the French ambassador—a fiction exploited by both sides to fan the war fever—and then the crash came.

But even so it seemed that Foch would be able to go back to Metz. The French army of the Rhine was preparing to invade Germany. The young man had the prospect of spending his next half year at college in the great fortress that would be the starting-point of the victorious advance—a place where he would see, not war, but all the stir and excitement of a great military centre close up to the war zone. But the first days of August brought news of defeat. Metz became a centre of the conflict—soon to be besieged. The classes did not reassemble at St. Clement, and the college was transformed into a military hospital. Ferdinand Foch remained at home, awaiting events.

September brought the catastrophe of Sedan. The Germans were marching on Paris, but the flood of invasion had passed far to the north of St. Étienne. The call for the new levies came; and Foch presented himself as a recruit at the local depot of the 4th Regiment of Infantry.

He was looking forward eagerly to seeing active service as Private Foch; but as chance would have it, he was to take no part in the fighting during the four months in which the new armies kept the field. After some weeks at the depot, he was sent with the 4th Battalion of the regiment to Châlons-sur-Saône. Here

he was not far from the scenes of the last episode of the war in eastern France—Bourbaki's march to the relief of Belfort ending in defeat and a retirement across the Swiss frontier. But the battalion remained on garrison duty just clear of this eastward eddy of the tide of war.

In January, 1871, came the armistice and the peace negotiations. The battalion was at once disbanded, and Foch found himself mustered out without having been under fire. However he had done his duty and made with full intent the sacrifice of his life if need be, and it was no fault of his that he had not undergone the supreme test of battle. "They also serve who only stand and wait"; and he had waited eagerly for the chance that was denied him. For him the war had come just too soon. If he had already reached the Polytechnique, he would have been one of the crowd of young men who on the news of first defeats on the frontier were at once commissioned to supply the cadres of officers for the batteries of the new armies and the defences of Paris. Instead of any such good fortune, he had had to spend four months as an infantry private in barracks and on the drill ground. But all the same, it had been a very useful experience. He had been doing a man's work. The infantry private's training under the severe discipline of war time was a useful element in his education. It would be a gain for the future officer to have shared the rough conditions of life in a barrack room. It would help him to understand better the men in the ranks, when he came to wear the epaulettes.

From Châlons-sur-Saône he returned to St. Étienne for a brief rest at home, and then resumed his studies.

The college of St. Clement at Metz had reopened in January. He went there in the following month. Metz was now a German fortress. The red-white-and-black flag flew over its forts, and a German general had his headquarters at the prefecture. There was a large garrison in the city. Indeed, so pressed for room were the conquerors, that part of the college had been requisitioned as a temporary barrack. It was in the midst of these reminders of the disasters that had befallen his country, that Foch prepared for his life work as a French officer. In the summer he went to Nancy, where an examination for admission to the Polytechnique was to be held.

The capital of Lorraine had not been included in the territory annexed by Germany; but a German garrison still held the city. General Manteuffel, commanding the army of occupation in eastern France, had made Nancy his headquarters. German troops were in barracks and billets in the city, their patrols passed along the streets every day, and one of their military bands played in the Place Stanislas. For the time being the German conquest was as much in evidence at Nancy as at Metz. Like other young men Foch must have had his day-dreams. But even the most ambitious dream could not suggest to him that in the coming years he would be the general in command at Nancy and would march from it to his first battle. Probably he thought mostly of his chances in the examination. He came out in the list of successful candidates, and went home for a well-earned holiday with the notification that he was to join the Polytechnique at Paris on November 1st.

CHAPTER II

ARMY CAREER UP TO 1905

SOUTHERN Paris—the old Quartier de l'Université—is the region of the schools. There it was that in 1794, under the government of the Directory, Gaspard Monge founded a new kind of college for which he invented a new name, a name that in its English form has come to be applied to more peaceful institutions. Gaspard Monge's Polytechnique was to be a college where young men would receive a scientific education to prepare them for "technical" work of various kinds in the service of the State either in a military or civil capacity.

Monge was a world-famous mathematician; so mathematics held a high place in the programme of his school. As the school was to supply the army with gunner officers and engineers it had from the outset a distinctly military character with a barrack element in its organization and a uniform for its students. But a large number of them would never be soldiers. They were to be builders and inspectors of roads and bridges. Later on, the course included preparation for the telegraph service and the tobacco monopoly offices. But even these future civil engineers and controllers of tobacco and matches lived under military discipline, drilled in the quadrangles of the barrack-like college, and were boy soldiers for the time being. Therefore when Foch, destined for the French artillery, put on his new uni-

form, on November 1st, 1871, and reported for duty and study at the Polytechnique, he felt that at last he had made a real start in his chosen career.

Here too, as at Metz and Nancy, there were reminders of the recent troubles of France. During the German siege the year before, the Polytechnique had been a hospital. In the second siege of the Commune the Federalists had held the school, and it had been stormed on May 24th, by a battalion of Chasseurs. The buildings bore traces of the fighting. Shells had burst on the roofs. There were bullet holes in the walls. After the capture of the Polytechnique, drum head court-martials had been held in one of the class rooms, and the condemned communists had been shot on the playground, the dead being collected afterwards in the large billiard-room. These recent memories of civil war were sadder even than the earlier record of defeat at the hands of the invader. It was under the impression of such memories that the directors of the Polytechnique suppressed the traditional school fêtes during this first year of resumed work.

Among Foch's fellow students there were two other future leaders of the Great War. One was a southerner like himself, and a year younger than Foch, but he had already commanded guns in action in the batteries of Paris during the first siege, for he was one of the students taken from the Polytechnique as an improvised artillery officer in the early days of the war. He was Joffre, the future chief of the French Staff and commander of the armies of France. The other was Ruffey —who was to be a member of the Conseil Supérieur de Guerre in 1914 and commander of the Third Army in the earlier operations.

In February, 1873, during the second year of studies, it was announced that, as officers were badly needed for the reorganized army, those who had done well in the annual examinations would have their course shortened in order to receive their commissions as soon as possible. Among those who were given this accelerated promotion were Joffre and Foch. Joffre had selected the engineers as his branch of the service; Foch was destined for the artillery. Before completing the full course at the Polytechnique he joined as a cadet the artillery school (École d'Application d'Artillerie) at Fontainebleau.

Paris had never had any attractions for him. He has all his life been a lover of the country, and the change to Fontainebleau was a welcome one. He was at last working at his profession amid ideal surroundings. He had learned to be at home in the saddle when he was a boy at Valentine. The great forest of Fontainebleau gave opportunities for many excursions. The little town itself was a place of historic memories, centering around episodes in the career of his hero, the great Emperor. He was in vigorous health, and his studious habits made the work of the classes easy. At the end of the course, he came out third in the examination list, a proof that he had made exceptionally good use of his time. He then received his commission as Sous-lieutenant in the artillery, and was told that he might choose the garrison to which he was to be attached. He selected his birthplace—Tarbes. There he would be among the old and loved Pyrenean scenes of his boyhood and within easy reach of the home of his people at Valentine.

Two years were spent at Tarbes in the round of regimental duties, with a first experience of the mild

imitation of campaigning supplied by the autumn manœuvres. The young soldier was still a student, busy with military history and technical works on his own special branch of the service. With a view to qualifying himself for future staff work, he applied for admission to the cavalry school at Saumur. In his four months of service during the Franco-German War he had learned something of infantry work. He had since then made himself an exceptionally capable artillery officer. He was now to learn the methods of the third arm of the service, the cavalry. He had been promoted to the full rank of Lieutenant at Tarbes. After a twelve months' course with the cavalry at Saumur, he was promoted in the summer of 1878 to the rank of Captain, and when he rejoined the artillery he was given command of a field battery in the 10th Regiment of Artillery at Rennes, in Brittany.

This Celtic province of far western France was to become the land of his adoption. In after years he was to speak of its soldiers as "my Bretons". No district in France has been more devoted to the nation, because, yet more than any other province, it keeps its local individuality, its own special nationalism. The old Celtic language is still spoken, the old literature of ballad and legend cultivated even among peasants and fishermen. The people are devoted to the old faith of France. For them the unseen world is a reality, and as sailors and soldiers they face death with the tranquil courage of men for whom it is only a passage to the other life that has been the background of their thought since childhood. The land itself jutting out into the Atlantic, broken with wild stretches of rocky upland and desolate moors, has for its monuments the dolmens

and menhirs of the vanished pagan days, with the village calvaries proclaiming the triumph of the cross. For Foch, a zealous and devoted Catholic, this Celtic land had a special glory of its own.

Here he made his new home; for it was while he was doing garrison duty at Rennes, that he met the lady whom he married in the same year—Mademoiselle Julie Bienvenue of St. Brieuc. After his marriage, he bought the estate and the old manor house of Trefeunteuniou, near Morlaix, in Finisterre, the far west of Brittany between the Montagne d'Arrée and the Atlantic coast. The estate was well wooded, when Foch bought it, and he has made extensive additions to the plantations in the years before the war. Forestry was one of his recreations. The long grey front of the house—with two rows of sunny windows and little dormer windows in the high-pitched roof—looks out between bowers of trees, across a broad stretch of meadow; and though the church of Ploujean is not far off, there is a domestic chapel in the garden near one end of the house.

During his stay at Rennes, he began his studies in immediate preparation for admission to the École de Guerre, the French Staff College founded during the reorganization of the army after the war of 1870-71. A course at the Staff College is the normal way, first to staff employment, and then to high command. Foch knew that success in his career must depend entirely on his own efforts. He had no influential friends in high places, and he had always held studiously aloof from politics. Considering the drift of French political affairs in these days he was seriously handicapped by a fact that is entirely to his credit. Anti-clericalism—to use a stupid but popular term—was in

fashion in Government circles in France. An officer was likely to find his professional merit and zeal disregarded and his promotion delayed if he openly professed and practised the religion that was associated with so much of the historic glories of France. The faith of St. Louis and Duguesclin, of Jeanne d'Arc and Bayard, of Champlain and Montcalm, was a barrier to a good soldier's success in his career. There even came a time when the Ministry of War at Paris had its secret dossiers noting as a black mark against an officer's name, that he went to Mass on Sundays. No doubt the names of men like De Castelnau and Foch were to be found in this list—which, happily for the future of the French army was before long denounced in the French Parliament and consigned to the waste paper basket.

The son of pious Catholic parents, a student in the Jesuit colleges, Ferdinand Foch has been all through his life an earnestly religious man, practising and professing his religion without either ostentation or concealment, and paying no attention to what those who were hostile to it might think or say of him. He made it the guide of his life, the inspiration of his high ideals of duty and self sacrifice. He knew that this might well be an obstacle to him in his professional career, but that made no difference. "Fais ce que tu dois, advienne qui pourra"—"Do what you ought, come what may"—was the rule of his life. He was conscious of mental power and capacity, and worked steadily to fit himself for command should the opportunity come. The way he chose was continual application to the serious scientific study of his profession. Others took a more adventurous, and what they hoped would be a more rapid, way to promotion, by volunteering for one or

other of the many little wars of France's growing colonial empire. They fought, and won distinction, in Algeria, Tunis, Morocco, the Senegal and Niger regions, Tonkin and Madagascar. Foch remained in France, doing the daily round of duty, giving his leisure hours to study, and waiting to take his part in the defence of his country in the Great War in Europe—the war that was often predicted but deferred year after year until those who spoke of it were at last in danger of being regarded as hopeless pessimists. Yet it was coming slowly but surely. For, as Bismarck put it in his later years, "All the Great Powers were busy piling up explosives, and some day a spark would bring the explosion."

From Rennes Foch was called to Paris to act for some months as one of the experts of the technical department of artillery at the War Office—a first official recognition of his scientific ability. In 1885, he secured admission to the Staff College, the École de Guerre. Years after, when he was himself a teacher there, he noted that though the Staff College of France was founded in 1876, it was not till 1882 that a reasonable and practical teaching of the science of war was given there.* He began his course of studies in the School when the new method of teaching had made some progress—a method that, instead of abstract theory, made the detailed account of recent military history the basis of the teaching, and presented the theory of war as a series of practical deductions from well-ascertained facts.

* Il faut arriver à 1882-83 en France pour trouver de la guerre un enseignement rational et pratique, et celà, bien que notre École datât de 1876. Il n'avait pas donc suffi de porter l'inscription sur les murs pour créer l'École de Guerre."—*Principes de la Guerre*, p. 2.

The course lasted for two years. At the final examination, in the summer of 1887, he came out fourth on the list. But besides winning this high place, he had made his mark there in other ways. His soldier professors—men who would soon themselves hold high command and act as the advisers of the Government in questions of promotion—recognized in the Captain of Artillery a man with a wide knowledge of all the arms of the service and a student of war who could think for himself and had his own way of facing every problem, a power of stating its conditions clearly and suggesting a solution that took into account the realities of war. His years of earlier study had borne good fruit.

After passing successfully through the École de Guerre, an officer is usually given the opportunity of further training by actual experience of staff work. Foch was sent to the south of France, to the coast region of the Mediterranean, to serve for awhile on the staff of the Sixteenth Army Corps, which had its headquarters at Montpellier. He was then for awhile attached as a staff officer to one of the divisions of the same Army Corps. In February, 1891, he was promoted to the rank of Chef d'Escadron (Major of Artillery), and recalled to Paris, where he was attached to the Third Section of the General Staff of the Army, which has to deal with the planning of military operations, and among other duties works out the schemes for the annual training manœuvres.

He had now had some years of useful experience in staff work, but it was his good fortune not to have to settle down to the routine of an office, but again to receive an active command. His knowledge of cavalry

tactics and his fine horsemanship led to his appointment to the command of the group of artillery batteries attached to the 13th Regiment of Artillery, with headquarters at Vincennes. In 1894, he was again serving on the General Staff of the Army, and in the following year he was appointed Assistant Professor of Military History and Strategy at the École de Guerre.

He remained there six years. In 1900 came his promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and at the same time he was appointed to the full professorship, becoming the chief and not mere assistant teacher of History and Strategy. It was during these years that he made his mark in the French army and deeply influenced its coming leaders. Eighty picked officers joined the school each year, so that during the time of his professorship nearly five hundred were his pupils—men who in the ordinary course of events would rise in the following years to the command of regiments, brigades, divisions and army corps. Among them were many of the generals who have done good service for France and her Allies in the Great War.

A professor addressing such an audience and rising to the possibilities of his position might well feel that he was laying the foundations of future victories for his country. He had before him an extremely critical audience, no mere beginners but men who had already studied the science he was teaching, and many of whom had commanded troops in active service. It was only an exceptional man who could impress them as he did from the outset with the feeling that they were listening "to the most gifted and original of the professors in the Ecole de Guerre".

He spoke in a calm, measured, sometimes almost

monotonous voice, using no gestures, having indeed rather the air of an exponent of some rigid science than of a lecturer on the clash of armies, the march and the battle, with all their vivid incidents of human effort.

He did not neglect the human element in war, nor attempt to reduce it to a mere mechanical problem; but he would analyse the course of events with the impartiality of a judge, betraying no feeling for either side, as map in hand he traced the development of a campaign, fixing the situation at each moment, asking the questions, What was to be done? What was known to the leaders? What course did they take? How did they reason it out? What better line could they have chosen? What was the result actually obtained? And what were the consequences, how could success have been improved or defeat averted? He made his hearers realize the conditions under which armies fight and are led, the difficulties of leadership, the inevitable failure at times to rise to the possibly ideal solution of the problem when it is set not by the teacher in the class room but by the swift development of events amidst the stress and "fog" of war. He was a realist in his teaching. Every statement as to the guiding principles of leadership was based on a wealth of examples from military history. There were times when, as one of his pupils notes, the very abundance of knowledge that he poured forth required a strong effort of attention to follow his line of thought. But those who heard him were ready for the effort, and they were delighted and inspired by their teacher. He was able to accomplish with them what he had in view—to give the French army through its future chiefs a practical doctrine of war, and a widely accepted doctrine that would secure,

when the day of trial came, mutual understanding and intelligent co-operation for the common end.

What the characteristics of his doctrine of war were, we shall see later, when we come to analyse his writings. These are contained in the two volumes in which he summed up his lectures at the École de Guerre, after he had left it for awhile to take up other duties.

In 1901, Foch returned for a time to service with the artillery, being given command of the 29th Regiment at Laon, an appointment which gave him the opportunity of becoming intimately acquainted with a district that was to be of considerable importance in the Great War. It was at Laon that he prepared for publication his *Principes de la Guerre.* The book included the lectures given, in 1900, at the École de Guerre. It was at once recognized by military critics in all countries as the work of a master hand.* In 1903, he was promoted to the full rank of Colonel, and given command of the 35th Regiment of Artillery with headquarters at Vannes, in Brittany, an appointment all the more welcome because it brought him back to his "adopted land", and to the neighbourhood of his home in Finisterre. During this stay in Brittany, he prepared for the press and published his second book, *De la Conduite de la Guerre,*† based on work he had done for his class at the École de Guerre. It is a treatise on leadership in war, founded on a painstaking analysis of the German staff work and operations in the first stage of the Franco-German War.

* *Des Principes de la Guerre, Conférences faites à l'École Supérieure de Guerre* (Paris, Berger-le-Vrault, 1901). 2nd edition, 1903; 3rd edition, 1911; reprinted, 1917.

† *De la Conduite de la Guerre. La Manœuvre pour la Bataille* (Paris, 1904). 2nd edition, 1906; 3rd edition, 1915.

In 1905, he was given an important staff appointment, the command of the artillery of the Fifth Army Corps at Orleans. It was a command usually given to a general, and many of his old comrades of the École Polytechnique had already reached that rank. But his promotion was delayed until June 20th, 1907. It was only then that Ferdinand Foch, now nearly fifty-six years of age, received the well-merited rank of Brigadier General (General de Brigade). With the promotion came an appointment to the General Staff of the Army at Paris.

He was not to hold his new post for more than a few weeks. General Bonnal, who had been his chief during the latter part of his professorship at the École de Guerre, had just resigned his position as Director of the School. Several distinguished generals had their names at once put forward as candidates for the vacant appointment. Foch was not among them, perhaps because he thought he could hardly be an acceptable candidate in the eyes of the fiercely "anti-clerical" M. Clemenceau, then the Prime Minister. But one day he was surprised by receiving an invitation to lunch with the Premier. When he arrived at the house, he found that he was the only guest. During the déjeuner there was general conversation on various subjects, but not a word was said of the vacancy at the École de Guerre. It was only when the coffee and cigars stage had been reached, that Clemenceau said, without a word of introduction:—

"I have some news for you, General. You are appointed Director of the École de Guerre."

"But I am not a candidate," said Foch, who was completely surprised by the announcement.

"Possibly," replied Clemenceau; "but you are appointed all the same, and I am sure you will do good work there."

The General thanked him, but suggested a difficulty.

"Probably, you are not aware," he said, "that one of my brothers is a Jesuit."

Clemenceau laughed. "I know all about it, and I don't care a rap. Mon general, or rather Monsieur le Directeur, you are appointed, and all the Jesuits cannot after it. You will make good officers for us, and that is the only thing that matters."

Of course, Foch accepted the promotion thus frankly offered to him by the politician whom he had believed to be anything but his friend. He had spoken of his Jesuit brother out of a delicate sense of honour. He could not believe, until he was assured to the contrary, that Clemenceau knew the facts, and he felt that the Premier's colleagues might resent his action in making such an appointment, and that some of his opponents might protest against the soldier brother of Père Foch being given such a position. But with frankness on both sides, the way was now clear. Clemenceau, like a sensible man did not think of allowing his anti-clericalism to prevent the best possible appointment being made for the École. And no work could have been more welcome to Foch. He was returning to what he held to be the most useful centre of activity for himself in the French army.

CHAPTER III

FOCH'S FIRST PRINCIPLES OF WAR

FOCH was in command at the École de Guerre for the four years from 1907 to 1911. Once more some hundreds of officers—who were to be among the leaders of the French army in the Great War that was now so near at hand—came under his inspiring influence. The professors, who formed his staff, had been his pupils. His two published works were used as authoritative text books.

We may proceed to an examination of these masterly treatises, which have a twofold interest. For they not only set forth those principles of the art of war, which he was before long to illustrate by his own brilliant leadership in the field, but they also in many ways reveal the character of their author.

His *Principes de la Guerre* appeared, as we have already noted, in 1903; his second work, *De la Conduite de la Guerre,* in 1905.

At the very outset, Foch warns the reader of his *Principes* that the book is not meant to be a complete treatise on war, but a discussion of some of its principles from a practical point of view. The author of a very remarkable essay on the same subject, published in the "Journal of the Royal United Service Institution" during the war, notices that on the first page of the "Field

Service Regulations of the British Army" we are told that:—

"The fundamental principles of war are neither very numerous nor in themselves very abstruse, but the application of them is difficult and cannot be made subject to rules. The correct application of principles to circumstances is the outcome of sound military knowledge, built up by study and practice until it has become an instinct."

And he then remarks that throughout the rest of the book no further reference is made to those principles, and there is no attempt even to enumerate them. Foch in the same way tells us, that, when a young officer joins his regiment, he hears of the "principles of war" as the guide in military operations, but is not told much more about them, nor does he find much light thrown upon them in the average military books. They seem to be taken for granted. He is told that "these principles are matter of common sense and judgment: their application varies with the circumstances: they are not written down to be learned."

Foch therefore tries to give a clear explanation of some of these dominant principles and to show their application to various situations taken from recent military history, discussing their probable application in a future war under modern conditions. The principles are eternal; the circumstances continually changing. The principles themselves are determined by the study of military history; in other words, they have been fixed by practical experience of successful war as conducted by its great leaders.

To teach a doctrine of war is, therefore, something

different from laying down the principles of some abstract science. Foch, indeed, hesitates to speak of a "science of war". War is rather an art, an affair of action directed by right knowledge and clear thinking. To prepare oneself for such action one must keep in mind realities not abstractions, and deduce all theory from ascertained fact, keeping in view all the time its practical application under existing conditions.

Foch does not hesitate to declare that the teaching of war in France was very defective, not only before the disastrous war of 1870, but long after it. The human element in war was left out of account. There was the constant tendency to reduce the theory to a mere affair of numbers, time and space. And the result of these attempts to develop a kind of exact and mathematical theory of war, was a theory that, as Foch puts it, "had the drawback of being radically false because it left out of account the most important factor in the problem—man, with his moral, intellectual and physical faculties, and in trying to make of war an exact science disregarded its essential character as a terrible and impassioned drama." One human element was indeed taken into account—the influence of the great leaders. But the whole point of view being astray, this was neither understood nor explained. History was treated only in bold outline; it was history after the manner of M. Alexander Dumas, a series of marvellous exploits, "unexplained and inexplicable unless indeed one admitted the existence of mysterious causes of the nature of the miraculous or the fatalistic, such as the incomprehensible genius of a Napoleon, or even 'his star'."

The natural result of such teaching was the idea that after all any serious study of war was not important.

One had the gift of leadership, or one had not; and it was on the field of battle one would find out. It used to be said that war could only be learned *in war*. But as Foch points out, there came a rude awakening in 1870, when the French army found itself opposed to "adversaries whose minds were formed by the teaching of history and the study of concrete cases; for since the beginning of the century it was thus that Scharnhorst, Willisen and Clausewitz, had formed the men who were to command the Prussian army."

Foch never hesitates to recognize the merits of even the enemy of the past, the probable opponent of the future. Thus, again, we find him prefacing his long examination of the Battle of Nachod (1866), by the remark that the Prussian regiments engaged had not fired a shot since the campaign of Waterloo, while the Austrians had been at war as recently as 1859; yet the conduct of the battle demonstrated that the Prussian officers without having made war had learned to understand it, while the Austrians had made war without understanding it or learning anything from it.

Military history must, therefore, be the basis of all useful study of war. It is quite true that no mere study can of itself make the successful leader, but it gives to the student a familiarity with principles deduced from practice, the habit of grasping the essential points of a military problem and applying those principles to it, and as Foch puts it "the bent of mind that suggests a rational method of manœuvring."

He dwells upon the importance for an army of having the same way of thinking on such matters—a generally accepted doctrine of war. Hence will come the same way of regarding a situation, the same way of acting,

and this will facilitate both command and co-operation. Again and again he insists that practical realities must be kept in view; war is not a chess game; men are the actors in it. Its climax is the battle, and the result of the battle depends on moral or mental even more than upon material force. With a frank realism, in almost the opening words of his first lecture he describes war as "waged on the battlefield in the midst of the unforeseen, under the stress of danger, making use of surprise and all the qualities of force, violence, brutal strength, to create terror." The battle is the effort ultimately to break down not merely the opponent's fighting power, but his courage, his hope, "his will to conquer." With Foch, the "will to conquer" is the most essential thing in war. As long as it is not lost, there will be no disaster. And this is why he puts aside as misleading the old-fashioned mathematical theories of war, which used to leave out of account the human or, as he would put it, the moral and spiritual element.

Goethe—sitting by a camp fire with some Saxe Weimar officers, on the night of September 20th, 1792, after the Battle of Valmy—said to them:—"I tell you that from this place there dates a new era in the world's history." It was at least a new date in the history of war, is Foch's comment. The wars of kings were ending, the wars of peoples beginning.

The wars of the eighteenth century had been carried on by comparatively small armies of professional soldiers. The nineteenth century was to see the development of wars by "nations in arms"; and the evolution had begun with the conscript levies of the Revolution. In the former period grave teachers of the art of war

had insisted on the merit of avoiding a battle and forcing the enemy to retire by dexterous manœuvres. They had regarded the reduction of fortresses, the occupation of territory, as sufficient objects of a campaign. Survivors of the old school acted on the same ideas even in the Napoleonic wars. In 1814, we find Schwartzenberg crossing the Rhine at Basel and directing his march on Langres, because the plateau of Langres was supposed to be the "key of France."

For Napoleon there was only one objective. It was not geographical but military—the enemy's main army. To manœuvre for a decisive battle under favourable conditions was what he sought. As for fortresses, he said they were captured on the battlefield. The enemy's fighting strength in the field once broken, the fortresses must fall to the victor. Strange to say, it was not in France, but in Germany, that the lessons of the great soldier's campaigns were first understood. It was Clausewitz who summed them up in his famous unfinished book *On War*. Scharnhorst had laid the foundation of the Prussian system of the "nation in arms"—the regular army as the training school for huge reserves. Clausewitz summed up the lessons of the wars of the Revolution and the Empire. He popularized the central idea of the decisive battle with an enemy's main army as the objective to be kept in view in war.

Foch fully recognizes the services of the German writers to the development of a theory of modern war, and his works are full of quotations from them—from Clausewitz to Von der Goltz. But he continually goes back to the source of their inspiration—to the records of Napoleon's campaigns, the Emperor's despatches,

letters and notes on war. To his mind the Germans are the pupils of Napoleon, and not always apt pupils. He makes abundant use of the studies of Napoleon's campaigns produced by the Section Historique of the French Staff. He had studied the works of General Bonnal, his predecessor at the École de Guerre. He accepts the broad outlines of Bonnal's theory of Napoleonic strategy; but his thoroughly practical view of war prevents him from seeking like Bonnal to reduce a series of campaigns to the same almost mathematical formulas.

Napoleon's campaigns represent the beginnings of modern war. These are to be studied. Next in value to them for the student are the campaigns directed by the elder Von Moltke. For the study of any event in the wars of 1866 and 1870 fully detailed narratives are available, and detail is essential in the study of military history. So we find Foch making use of many examples from these wars to build up and illustrate his theory.

He sums up the lesson to be derived from Napoleon's campaigns, the basis of all his teaching, in a quotation from Clausewitz:—

"Modern war is the outcome of the ideas of Napoleon, who was the first to set in a clear light the importance of preparation, and the overwhelming power of mass multiplied by impulse to break down the moral and material forces of the enemy in a battle sought for from the very outset of the war." *

In the national wars of our time, the preparation begins years beforehand. It is part of the systematic permanent army organization, directed to securing as complete and rapid mobilization as possible, followed

* *Principes de la Guerre*, p. 42.

by the ordered concentration of the armies at their starting point on the frontier. The mass to be launched into the struggle now involves all the resources of the belligerent. "Impulse", the driving force that brings the mass to bear on the striking point, implies movement; and Foch insists that, whether in attack or in defence, movement is the soul of the battle. "Movement is the law of strategy. . . . The tactics of the battlefield must be tactics of movement." To obtain the decisive result, there must be the shock of the greatest possible force hurled upon the enemy.

The battle must be sought for, not merely awaited, far less avoided as in the old-fashioned eighteenth century campaigns of manœuvre.

But the enemy also is in movement. He must be discovered, and held so that the stroke can be delivered against him. Hence the need of detachments manœuvring to fulfil this special mission. Here we have Napoleon's strategical advanced guard and "mass of manœuvre." Bonnal had developed the idea already very fully in his teaching at the École de Guerre and in his studies of various Napoleonic campaigns. He and his followers, however, exaggerate the uniformity of Napoleon's application of the principle. They try to trace a rigid reproduction of the "pivotting square," the advance *en bataillon carré* of the Jena campaign, in every subsequent war conducted by the great soldier. The mere formula dominates their teaching. Foch, with a clearer vision of the facts and a more practical application of their lessons, gives a freer interpretation of the Emperor's war methods, an interpretation that is a better guide to the application of the idea to modern war. Obviously, the movements of the vast armies of

to-day cannot be crushed into the Procrustean limits that sufficed for the relatively small armies of Napoleon. But it is the spirit of his leadership, not the mere form, that matters; and Foch fixes the minds of his hearers and readers on the practical essentials.

The preparation must include a plan based on a profound study of the task to be accomplished, and a detailed examination of the ground. It must not be a rigid scheme, but should be capable of modification. The essential point is to bring the largest possible mass up to the striking point, and launch it "all together against the same objective."

The problem is not an easy one with the huge armies of to-day. It was comparatively simple for a Turenne or a Frederick the Great, with his army camped under canvas in one body, with its magazines of supplies, near at hand. In those days men talked of the "maximum army", the number that could not be exceeded without making the weapon unmanageable. This may have been correct enough, considering the resources supplied by the organization of those past times. But to-day there is no maximum. The army is the armed nation.

Foch now puts the question—How is this concentrated attack on the vital point by the main mass, this union of all available forces in the movement, to be realized, while at the same time providing the necessary detachments which are to gain touch with and hold the enemy and generally safeguard the operation? Here, he tells us, there must come into play the principle of the economy of force.

The word "economy" is not used here in its popular

sense of sparing and saving, but rather in its old Greek sense of management. There must, it is true, be a cutting down of all useless expenditure; but this is done, not to save, but to have as much as possible to expend in the vital essential effort.

The principle, he tells us, is easier to describe than to define. He dates its appearance in war from the time when Carnot was directing the operations of the Revolutionary armies. But one may perhaps suggest that it was a revival, a re-discovery, of an older method, not a complete innovation in the ways of war. But Foch is quite justified in regarding Carnot's orders to the Republican generals as a new departure, so far as regarded the adopted methods of eighteenth century war. It seems obvious enough to obtain a local preponderance by neglecting minor objectives, reducing all detachments to a minimum, and pushing the striking force thus accumulated against a single decisive point. This is, in familiar language, the "economy of force"; but, obvious as it seems, it was not the method of the average general of the pre-Revolutionary period.

In those days it was the established tradition to fritter away a huge force in providing garrisons and guards for every mile of a frontier: to organize the field army on a set pattern, of centre, right wing, left wing and reserve: to put several of these armies in the field on various fronts without any unity of command. Even the initiative of Carnot—soon abandoned to be resumed and developed by Napoleon did not break the tradition completely. It was revived again in France during the Restoration. It appeared again in the French official manual of the Service en Campagne of 1883, which was the accepted guide for leadership

in war until after 1895, which set forth that "Armies are organized with a centre, wings and reserve."

Foch points out that armies are crippled by such fixed formulas of organization, for operations in the field. The mass of living force must be in the hands of the commander with full freedom to group and regroup its units as the necessities of the day demand, and his guiding principle will be the fixed purpose to aim at one great objective, disregarding mere local loss or gain so long as that vital decisive end is gained, directing upon the chosen point the mass of his force, protected and guided by the vanguard that gains touch with and holds the enemy, and avoiding all dissipation of force to subsidiary objects. It was Frederick the Great who said wisely that one might well lose a whole province for awhile, if one could thereby help to win the war.

So for the army of operations we have the logical division into (1) advanced guards using the capacity of resistance: (2) the main battle force, using the capacity for the shock or impact upon the enemy at the vital point.

As for the detachments from the main battle force, which Foch classes under the name of advanced guards, he illustrates their mission and practical working by taking an outpost line and showing how its sentries or sentry groups keep touch with and watch the enemy, and if he advances are supported by the larger units of the second line, which hold the enemy until the main force can come into action. The outpost line of a halted force and the advanced guard of a force on the move are essentially the same thing. The flank guard is a similar organization to protect the flank of

a line of march. Then we have a detailed examination of Napoleon's campaign in Italy, in 1796, to show how he used detachments, now here now there, to hold one part of the Allied forces while he employed his main fighting force to strike a series of deadly blows. He thus secured the "economy of forces" that enabled him to be always the stronger at the striking point, though the aggregate numbers opposed to him were superior to his own.

Viewed in comparison with the wars of to-day, the campaign was a small affair. Foch only analyses its opening phase, the advance of the French army from the Riviera across the Alps into Piedmont—some 32,000 ragged Republican troops against 70,000 Austrians and Piedmontese, divided up into the old organization of centre, left and right wings to hold the mountains in fixed positions. The operations of this first stage of the campaign only cover part of the month of April. Foch uses this little campaign to illustrate the great principles that apply even with armies of millions. He shows us how Bonaparte used the new working organization of advanced guards, attacking to reconnoitre and hold the enemy for the advantage of the main body, or meeting an attack of the enemy to cover its operations, and the main body manœuvring to strike at the selected objective. The advanced guards were the detachments under Laharpe, Serurier, Cervoni and Rampon; the main battle force was made up of the divisions of Masséna and Augereau and the cavalry. It was a small army; its divisions were often weaker in numbers than a modern brigade. And it was outnumbered two to one by the enemy. But victory was secured by the tactics that gave local superiority at the

decisive point. We have Napoleon's own account of the method that won this success, in his conversation with Moreau, when they discussed the Italian campaign.

"When I found myself," he said, "with a weaker army in presence of a large army, I rapidly grouped mine so as to be able to fall like a thunderbolt on one of the enemy's wings and overwhelm it. I took advantage of the confusion that this manœuvre could not fail to produce in the enemy's army to attack it at another point, always with the mass of my forces. I thus beat him in detail, and the victory thus gained was, as you see, the triumph of the greater number over the less."

Foch adds the comment, that it was the art of contriving to secure numerical superiority at the point of contact—the "economy of force" in operation—and throwing disorder into the enemy's ranks by these successive blows, at the same time raising the moral superiority of his own army by success. This was war as Napoleon conducted it.

Now still taking this little campaign as his text, he raises another question. The title of the lecture that deals with it sounds somewhat paradoxical. It is characteristic of Foch's originality of treatment, that he boldly invents new formulas, and gives a new and wider meaning to old ones. His title is—"Intellectual discipline—Freedom of action in order to obey"—(*Discipline intellectuelle—Liberté d'action pour obéir.*) He has just examined the mechanism of the campaign of 1796. He now points out that the link between the Commander-in-Chief and his subordinates is this, for in any combined operation there must be discipline, obedience.

For the subordinate officers, it must be (he tells us) in the first place "intellectual discipline," bringing home to them a clear idea of the result that their Commander-in-Chief has in view, and secondly "intelligent and active discipline, or rather, initiative," with the result that they act in accordance with his will. He adopts Von der Goltz's description of initiative as "the manifestation of personal will seconded by judgment and acting in the sense of the plans of the higher command." With the great armies of to-day, the subordinate leaders must exercise an intelligent obedience. There must be activity of mind. A mere unthinking passive obedience like that of a machine was perhaps sufficient in the small armies of the past, where it was easier for the Commander-in-Chief to define the task of his subordinates; but something more is wanted with armies of millions, in which the subordinates themselves command perhaps hundreds of thousands. In such a case an order from the higher command will at most outline the movement and define clearly the object to be attained. The general who receives it has to decide on the way in which it is to be carried out and adapted to the special circumstances of the moment on his own front. Initiative is therefore a necessity.

Foch remarks that to obey in war is not an easy thing; for one has to carry out one's orders "in presence of the enemy, and despite the enemy's efforts; amid varying conditions—the unseen, the unknown with all its menace of peril, and notwithstanding the fatigue which results from many causes."

Moltke put the same idea in another way, when he said that in time of peace a decision once taken could

always be carried out; but in war our will soon clashes with the independent will of the enemy.

So the clear grasp of the intention conveyed by an order, with the ready determination to carry it out, is not enough; the order will have to be carried out under the menace of hostile action tending to prevent or at least delay its execution. So the subordinate, who receives it, must preserve what Foch describes as his freedom of action in order to obey. He notes that the whole object of war is to maintain one's freedom of action and take it away from the enemy. This freedom of action—freedom, that is, from interference on the part of the enemy—is to be obtained by what Foch calls *sûreté*.

The word, as he uses it, can hardly be translated by a single equivalent word in English. And with him it is a favourite word, conveying ideas that play a large part in his teaching and in his attitude of mind. It implies not only "safety" or "security" and the measures that ensure it, but something more. It means also "sureness"—all that goes to give the commander, whether of an army or of a small group operating in the presence of an enemy, a clear view of the situation and the power of acting with a grasp of realities.

As usual, he makes his meaning clear to his class and his readers, by taking examples from military history, examining them in detail, and showing the influence of this *sûreté* or of its absence. In a mere review of his writings like this, one cannot follow the full exposition that he gives of even one such example. But one may try to summarize some point in his examination of an incident in the Franco-German War, that is referred to in even the least technical of the popular histories of the time as one of those failures of effective co-operation

between the French commanders that had most disastrous consequences.

On August 4th, 1870, the French detachment under General Abel Douay, stationed at Wissemburg near the German frontier, was overwhelmed after a brave resistance by the advance of the Crown Prince Frederick's army. That day Marshal MacMahon was in position on the hills above Woerth with the First Army Corps, formed of the veteran regiments he had commanded in Algeria. He intended to offer battle on this position in the hope of stopping the Crown Prince's advance. He was heavily outnumbered by the Crown Prince's army, which would be in position to attack him in the next forty-eight hours, and he badly needed reinforcements. The nearest available force for this purpose was the Fifth Army Corps, under De Failly, about thirty miles away to the northwest, at Sarreguemines.

On the afternoon of August 4th, De Failly received orders by telegraph to move his army corps to the support of MacMahon. He had two of his divisions near Sarreguemines, and the other at the hill fortress of Bitsche about halfway to Woerth. The order wired to him ran: "Concentrate your Army Corps immediately about Bitsche." But the object of the order was clear enough. If he could have all his troops at Bitsche on the 5th, he would be within a few hours' march of MacMahon's position, and ready to support him on the 6th.

With his habitual painstaking thoroughness, Foch gives us a reproduction of the French staff-map of the ground, on which to follow his narrative of the way in which De Failly acted on this order. He discusses his action, and he shows how he ought to have executed the order, working out all the arguments on which this

better plan of action is based, and marking the map to show what would have been the result. And the whole forms a clear illustration of what he means by "intellectual discipline" and "freedom of action in order to obey." He insists on these two points, because in all his teaching at the École de Guerre his object was not merely to give his soldier-pupils information and rules for their guidance, but to inspire them with the true military spirit and form the character that makes a self-reliant commander. In his own mind there was no idea of setting himself up as a model, for there is no egotism about Foch. But we may say that, without any self-conscious realization of the fact, he was trying to make them into men of his own high ideals, soldiers of his own stamp.

Following the movement hour by hour, he shows us how De Failly acted, and how grievously he blundered and failed. The 3rd Division of the Fifth Corps was at Bitsche: the 1st and 2nd Divisions at Sarreguemines. He was to move these two divisions to Bitsche over about fifteen miles of good road. The weather was fine. There are long bright summer evenings in the first week of August. The two divisions might have started on the 4th and made good progress towards Bitsche reaching the place by a short march early next day. But De Failly sent off the 1st Division only, and it marched less than five miles before bivouacking. He kept the 2nd at Sarreguemines,—Why?

Sarreguemines and Bitsche and the road between them were only a few miles from the frontier. The Germans had shown no force of any importance on that part of it; but they had cavalry patrols, which occasionally showed themselves and exchanged a few shots with

the French horsemen watching the border line. De Failly thought he must guard Sarreguemines as long as possible, and kept his 2nd Division there. Even the division that moved out was warned that it might be attacked on the road, and marched with elaborate and badly arranged precautions, halting at each cross road till the country towards the border had been explored by patrols. "Instead of going to Bitsche," remarks Foch, "there was the idea of guarding everything; instead of obeying his orders, he is guided by his own personal views. Here we have the lack of intellectual discipline."

On August 5th, De Failly is still holding on to Sarreguemines. He keeps half of his 2nd Division there all day. He sends off the other half towards Bitsche. At noon, it had only reached the village of Rohrbach, about halfway. From Rohrbach, a valley opened eastward through the hills towards the German frontier. Some enemy had shown themselves in the valley. They retired before an advance of French cavalry. But De Maussion, who commanded the brigade that reached Rohrbach, was so alarmed that he decided to go no further but to halt there and watch the "Rohrbach gap." Cavalry and infantry, reported to be Germans, were said to be near at hand in front. De Maussion threw out a skirmishing line which opened fire on them, and then discovered that they were French troops of the division that had started for Bitsche the day before. Marching without either advanced guard or flank guard to protect it, this division had been moving slowly, halting continually, sending out patrols in all directions. By evening it halted, not at Bitsche, but nearly two miles from it, with the men tired out by the slow

march and the endless halts and patrol work under a blazing sun. Result—on the evening of the 5th, when the two divisions should have been at Bitsche, one was near it; of the other, one brigade was halfway, and the remaining brigade had not even started from Sarreguemines. Instead of being concentrated early on the 5th at Bitsche, the Fifth Corps was strung out over twenty miles of road. Here, Foch tells us, we see the results of false theories, lack of military spirit and intellectual discipline, ignorance of *sûreté,* dominance of mere personal views in the subordinate commander.

On August 5th, the headquarters of the army at Metz placed De Failly's Corps under the direct command of MacMahon, and the Marshal wired to its commander at 8 P.M.—

"Come to Reichshoffen (the Woerth position) with all your Army Corps as soon as possible. I expect you to join me to-morrow."

At 3 A.M. on August 6th, De Failly telegraphed that it was impossible. He could only send one division, the 3rd under General Lapasset (which had been at Bitsche for days). The 1st, worn out by the blundering of the day before, could not start in time. The 2nd Division was still far from Bitsche, most of it at Sarreguemines. Next morning, though Lapasset's division was to start at 6 A.M., it did not move till 7:30 on account of rumours brought in by the peasants, about large hostile forces close at hand. Lapasset had been for some time at Bitsche, but there was no *sûreté,* no organized information service. He was at the mercy of every story brought in by a tramp or a pedlar. When he could discover no enemy near him, he marched—but marched

under the impression of these rumours which delayed and deluded him all day. There was again no flank guard, no advance guard, the same endless halts while patrols searched the cross-roads and peasants were interrogated. In front, a few miles away, the cannon thunder told of a great battle. But the division crawled slowly along, to arrive only late in the afternoon, when MacMahon was in full retreat and the battle was lost.

In the French press, De Failly was denounced as a traitor. He was nothing of the kind. He was only, like so many of the French generals of the day, utterly ignorant of the first principles of war, utterly devoid of "intellectual discipline." The same defects led, a few weeks later, to the swift destruction of his corps in the surprise at Beaumont on the march to Sedan.

If De Failly had obeyed his orders, and obeyed them with intelligence and initiative, his three divisions would have been able to reinforce MacMahon by noon on the day of the battle. At that hour the French were still holding their own, and the intervention of a whole army corps might well have had a decisive result. Woerth, instead of being a disaster, might thus have been a victory for France.

But De Failly did not obey, because he had not kept what Foch calls the "freedom of action" that would make obedience not only possible but obvious and easy. And this freedom of action was wanting because he had not its necessary basis—what Foch calls *sûreté*. In fact, neither he nor his divisional commanders had any clear idea of how to obtain what the word implies—security from surprise and the sure grip of the situation that would enable them to act resolutely and swiftly. De Failly was haunted by the old military superstition,

that the only way to be safe was to disperse his force so as to guard every point. He was the easy victim of every vague report. So were his subordinates, like De Maussion and De Lapasset. Dominated by vague fears of the unknown, ignorant of how to guard themselves they were helpless to give efficient obedience. They had lost their freedom of action, though they had not had to face the conflict of their own wills with that of the enemy.

De Maussion, instead of marching on to Bitsche, halts his brigade for the rest of the day to watch the imagined dangers of the Trouée de Rohrbach, the valley or gap opening towards the enemy's country. But as Foch points out, a gap in the hills is not a danger in itself. One does not abandon one's orders, to form in battle array against it, like De Maussion who kept his men under arms part of the night. One does not fight against geographical features of the country, but against men. There may be danger of the enemy's advancing through a gap in force, though, by the way, there are roads over hills as well as through gaps. De Maussion had only to adopt ordinary precautions to ascertain that there was no serious force of the enemy in this direction, and leave a flank guard to watch the gap during the time—a short one—that it would take his brigade to march past it. It was a fairly simple problem of *sûreté*. But his blundering methods led to the sacrifice of his "freedom of action," and he failed to obey his orders and push on.

Foch proceeds to show how the movement should have been executed. There is no need to enter into details here, and without an elaborate map such details would be unintelligible. But the broad outline of the opera-

tion, as he describes it, is simple enough—like all sound military plans. De Failly on receiving the order should have acted at once, and started off the 1st and 2nd Divisions on the road to Bitsche. The long summer evening would allow good progress to be made before halting. The cavalry would send out patrols to the border line. A flank guard would give ample protection, moving forward from time to time as the column progressed, halting when need be, to be ready to meet any attempt to interrupt the movement, of which the cavalry would give warning. The two divisions would reach Bitsche early on the 5th. They would have a rest there that day. MacMahon's telegram in the evening would find the whole Fifth Corps concentrated and in good condition for a further march. Starting at 4 A.M. on the morning of the 6th (when it would be daylight, and the cool morning hours available for the march), the corps would reach the battlefield about 9 A.M. The battle had been begun by the individual action of one of the German commanders, and attempts had at first been made to break it off, for the Crown Prince did not intend to fight till the 7th, and half his army was still far from the field at 9 A.M. If MacMahon had had De Failly's corps at his command at that hour, or even some hours later, victory would have been within his grasp.

So the battle was lost by De Failly's failure to obey and to obey with intelligent initiative. He had been given a clear order and an easy task. The enemy had not opposed his movement. "The Fifth Corps," says Foch, "found no enemy in its way. But everything was done as if the enemy had been everywhere. It should have marched even in spite of his opposition. It failed to march even in his absence. The march was

regulated by false information, which was never verified. There was no reconnaissance, no proper protection. It was indeed through ignorance that the Fifth Corps disobeyed."

What a difference, he suggests, there was between this blundering operation and the methods of the little "Army of Italy" in 1796! One may now add, "what a difference between the blunders of 1870 and the clear-sighted action of the French generals of 1918!" And the difference is due to Foch's teaching as well as to his supreme direction.

CHAPTER IV

THE ADVANCED GUARD

CONCENTRATED action against the enemy's main army by "economy of force," enabling the striking mass to be collected for this vital operation; the advanced guard, in the general sense of all covering detachments, not only getting in touch with and reconnoitring the enemy, but "holding" him, so as to make the blow possible,—intelligent discipline and intelligent obedience and initiative on the part of subordinate commanders each in his own sphere, so as to make it possible for one mind to control and direct the whole; "freedom of action" secured by due measures of protection and reconnaissance; a clear grasp of the facts of the situation; in a word, all that security and sureness that Foch sums up under the term of *sûreté:*—these are the foundations of his whole theory of modern war.

The example of De Failly's unfortunate action in 1870 throws much light upon Foch's view of *sûreté* and the freedom of action it ensures. Many, who have discussed Foch's teaching, have dwelt rather upon the idea of concentrated action and the determined will to conquer, as its chief characteristic. At least as important is the idea of *sûreté.*

The word and the idea recur again and again in his writings. He uses it to include in one generalization, one application of a principle, matters which most

writers on war treat under various separate heads:—with French writers the service of exploration, the service of security: with writers of all countries, such topics as outposts, advanced flank and rear guards, and the tactics of a fighting retreat. The basis of the tactical working out of the idea is the delaying power of a relatively small force, this delay being intended to enable the main body either to effect a movement under its cover, or to come to its help, or to organize its own action. Examining still further the problem of De Failly's march, he works out in detail the action of the flank guards, supposing that there had been a German attack from the frontier against the flank of the line of march. One cannot here follow the details of this interesting discussion. We may note only some points that he brings into relief.

The flank guard is warned by its advanced patrols of cavalry, that the enemy is approaching. What is to be done? It must delay the attack, or hold it until the column has passed the danger point. How is it to do this? He quotes Carnot: "If the enemy is not in force, the question is easy to settle; if the enemy is in superior force, by taking up an impregnable position." But Foch, always eminently practical, notes that there are no impregnable positions, and any position held by merely relying on its strength and making a passive defence will be lost by the enemy manœuvring to turn it. Passive defence is like fencing when one only parries and makes no riposte, no counter-thrust. Sooner or later, the fencer is hit. But though a flank guard or similar detachment cannot find any "impregnable" position, there are "strong" positions, that lend themselves to the far-reaching effect of modern arms. Long

range will compel the enemy to deploy at a distance; rapidity of fire will make the results, even with a relatively small force, serious for the attack. So the problem of delaying the enemy is simplified. The enemy is forced to lose time, and further delay can be imposed upon him by falling back to make a stand on a second position.

To show what could be done by a small force well handled by a commander who both obeyed his orders to the letter, and took every precaution to act with security and sureness—with *sûreté*—he examines the operations not of a French commander, but of a German leader in the same war. Foch never allows national feeling to influence him in his appreciation of facts, and acts frequently on the old maxim, that one can rightly learn from an enemy—*Fas est ab hoste doceri.* He takes his example for study from General von Kettler's operations against Garibaldi at Dijon, in January, 1871. Von Kettler had under his command a brigade and two batteries, four thousand rifles and twelve guns. Garibaldi's force, known as the "Army of the Vosges" is variously estimated at from thirty to fifty thousand men. Dijon had been surrounded by entrenchments armed with heavy guns, and a division under General Pelissier had been assigned to the city in order to set Garibaldi and the army of the Vosges free for operations in the field. A definite object was indicated to him. It was a critical time. Bourbaki's army was endeavouring to reach Alsace and raise the siege of Belfort. Manteuffel, with the German army of the South, was hurrying to head him off. It was all-important to delay Manteuffel's movement eastwards. All that Garibaldi did was to move out less than five

miles to a point from which, without attacking it, he could see Manteuffel's flank guard moving across his front. Next day, he allowed the German army's convoy to pass him. He abandoned the bridges of the Saône with hardly a show of resistance. It was a moment when an attack, even followed by a lost battle, would have helped Bourbaki and France by delaying Manteuffel's march. But after doing nothing, Garibaldi retired to the works of Dijon.

Manteuffel's objective was the army of Bourbaki. Against that he directed his own army. But he could not entirely neglect the possible menace of a move from Dijon. He understood the need of *sûreté,* and he provided for it on his side with the most rigid care not to weaken his main striking force by detaching a man or a gun beyond what was strictly necessary. He gave Von Kettler only an infantry brigade and twelve guns. Foch shows how thoroughly the latter understood his mission, and how efficiently he executed it.

He was not content merely to "remain in observation" with his small force and watch Garibaldi. He got in close touch with Dijon, and made annoying attacks on the French outposts. Outnumbered ten to one, it was a risky game to play; but the German general had taken the measure of his opponent, and even when he was facing big risks, he did not forget the measures of *sûreté* that he could adopt. One of his attacks ended in serious loss, and was proclaimed as a great victory by Garibaldi; but the final result was that the Dijon force was kept occupied, and all the time that Manteuffel was operating against Bourbaki he had the certainty that Garibaldi would not move, or that if he moved Von Kettler would be able to send back ample warning. In

the end, Bourbaki was driven into Switzerland, without having received the remotest aid from the army of the Vosges at Dijon. There is a further lesson in the episode—a detached force, sent out to hamper and delay an enemy's operations, may at times obtain its object by incurring a local defeat. It may attack only to obtain delay, and the defeat of the detachment helps effectually to secure the victory of the main body—the only victory that has any decisive result.

Continuing his study of the problem of *sûreté,* Foch takes up again the example of De Failly's march. He has pointed out that a properly organized and well-handled flank guard would have ensured the necessary *sûreté,* and he proceeds with his analysis of the idea. What would the flank guard provide? First, it would secure for the main body, whether halted or on the move, safety from coming under hostile fire. This he calls *sûreté matérielle*—"material security." And, secondly, if the enemy made his appearance, it would hold him back and delay him until the main body had passed the danger point, thus permitting it to continue its movement and execute the order received. This is *sûreté tactique*—"tactical security."

"Material security" enables a force to live in safety in the midst of danger; "tactical security" enables a commander to execute his programme, to carry out his orders despite the difficulties of war, the unknown, the action of the enemy—to act surely and with certainty, whatever the enemy may do, by preserving for himself his freedom of action. The organization that safeguards this "tactical security" is the advanced guard; and Foch gives the widest meaning to the term. He includes in it what most writers divide up into the

subjects of advanced guards, flank guards, rear guards, outposts. It is for his purpose simply any detachment or group of detachments, that has to exert its power of resistance for the sake of the main body, in order to enable that main body to execute the operation entrusted to it. Its action is not merely defensive however. Every operation of war finally tends to the battle as the decisive act. And here comes in the function of the advanced guard, not as a mere protecting force, but as a means of preparing the attack. It gains touch with the enemy, holds him, reconnoitres his dispositions, so that the commander of the main body may be able to bring it into action and direct its stroke with that sureness and security that are summed up in the term *sûreté,* or to put it in other words, so that he may be able to exercise his freedom of action with a full knowledge of what is before him. The leader must neither be forced to conform to the enemy's action, nor fling himself blindly into the fight. An example illustrates this point.

Had De Failly brought up his army corps in the early hours of the battle of Woerth, and had he understood his business, how would he have had to act? He could not merely dribble his battalions and batteries into the fight piecemeal and haphazard, without much result. The principle of economy of force must come in. "One cannot be victorious everywhere," says Foch; "but it is enough to be victorious at one point. One must fight everywhere else with a minimum of forces, in order to have a crushing force at this point. There will be economy everywhere else, in order to be able to spend freely at the point where one means to secure the decision." So the Fifth Corps would be massed and de-

ployed facing the selected point, and during this preparation it must be covered by the advanced guard, which had already come into touch with the enemy and besides this protection was doing the work of reconnaissance.

But leaving special instances aside, one may generalize and say that it is the organization and efficient handling of the advanced guard that enables the commander to act with security and certainty despite the difficulties inherent in a state of war, despite the unknown, the free action of the enemy, the dispersion of his own units. Foch makes what looks at first sight a startling statement in the midst of his long discussion of *sûreté.* "The unknown—*l'inconnu* is the rule in wartime." In every war, armies have lived and moved in the midst of the unknown. In England a description of it has become generally accepted, since Lonsdale Hale invented the happily chosen term in a lecture at the Royal United Service Institution, and spoke of the "fog of war"—not gunpowder smoke, but the fog of the mental vision produced by the conditions of the conflict. Foch as usual makes his idea clear by referring to definite historical instances, such as MacMahon in Alsace in August not knowing anything of the numbers, place of concentration, and degree of readiness of the Germans, nor even of their advance, until a civilian, the sub-prefect of Wissemburg, brought him news that the Crown Prince was approaching: and, again, the ignorance of the actual situation that prevailed at the German headquarters in the days before the battle of Gravelotte: or, to take an earlier instance, the days before Jena at Napoleon's headquarters. But the unknown ceases to be a danger, if a well-commanded advanced guard is there to deal with its perils. Thus, in those

days of 1806, Lannes with Napoleon's advanced guard comes upon the army of Hohenlohe, and within twenty-four hours Napoleon has his army concentrated for a victorious battle. Foch uses a familiar example:—one is walking in a dark room, but one stretches out hands and arms in front to guard against a dangerous collision; the outstretched arms are the advanced guard. In dealing with this question of the "fog of war," he refers to the new difficulties of reconnaissance created by the introduction of long-range weapons, smokeless powder and the use of cover.

Foch wrote in 1901, and has not since revised his book. A great and marvellously rapid revolution in the art and the means of reconnaissance has come since then. In 1901 there was talk of the flying machine of the future among a few enthusiasts, who ran the risk that friends would become doubtful of their sanity. Lilienthal had been carrying out his flights on gliders two years before; but scientific opinion was doubtful about any really valuable result. The brothers Wright were secretly experimenting in America. In 1907, came Santos Dumont's staggering flight of a few yards near the ground on a clumsy aeroplane. It was a great event when Farman flew a kilometre in 1908. Next year, Blériot flew across the Channel. Before 1914, the aeroplane had ceased to be a novelty or a scientific toy. It was a recognized equipment for armies; and throughout the war it has become more and more their chief means of reconnaissance. The vanguard is now in great part aerial. *Sûreté* depends largely on the airmen. But even with this wonderful aid to *sûreté*, the unknown has not been entirely abolished. The "fog of war" still exists, as gigantic surprise operations on both sides have

proved. It will be interesting, when new editions of Foch's writings appear, to see how he deals with this new element in the great problem. This much, however, is certain. Even the help of the new "cavalry of the air" does not make obsolete or unnecessary the older methods of ensuring security and the power to act surely with the help of the advanced guard upon the ground.

Again, Foch shows how the advanced guard solves the difficulty that arises from "dispersion." He uses the word here, not to signify the lack of concentration, but the inevitable fact that any large force in movement must be spread out over a considerable space. An army corps on the march will cover, say fifteen miles of road, and it will be five or six hours before the rearmost units can possibly be in line if they form up for action on the front reached by the leading battalion. It cannot be sent into action *par petits paquets*—in a succession of small detachments. It must concentrate and be in hand. So for some time there must be a covering force out in front to protect the deployment and hold the enemy. Here again is the work of the advanced guard. It is no merely passive resistance that will suffice. It is part of the work of the advanced guard to occupy, at the cost of hard fighting, points of vantage that will help in the subsequent development of the main attack and at the same time force the enemy to deploy and show his strength and dispositions. A relatively small force in this position can afford to act boldly and cover a wide front, for every moment help is nearer and nearer at hand. The advanced guard attacks, not to obtain a decisive result, but to facilitate the subsequent effort for that result by the main body.

More than one military critic of note has blamed the

action of the German advanced guards, who, on the morning of August 6th, 1870, opened the attack on MacMahon and brought on the battle of Woerth, which the headquarters' staff had planned for next day, the 7th. Foch praises them. In the Prussian lines it was thought that there were signs of the French preparing to retreat. Trains were heard moving out of the station at Niederbronn, behind their position, and the advanced guard was sent into action. "Rightly," says Foch; "for it is of the highest importance that at the moment when a battle is being prepared the enemy should not be free to do as he pleases and avoid the shock." So too at Spicheren (Forbach), on the same day, Steinmetz attacked without orders from headquarters, because he thought that the French under Frossard were about to retreat. He was right, says Foch; and he makes some of his familiar comparisons:—"One does not strike out with the fist at an enemy who is running away. One first seizes him by the collar to force him to receive the blow. The hand on the collar is the action of the advanced guard."

So we have the advanced guard fulfilling a triple office, to solve a threefold difficulty: feeling its way into the unknown, gaining touch, clearing up the situation; at the same time covering the concentration and deployment of the main body, and holding the enemy. It must attack to secure the ground necessary for the deployment of the main body; it passes to the defensive when these ends have been gained. It must attack also to hold the enemy. With Foch, attack means success, and war is movement against the enemy, not waiting to parry the enemy's thrusts and leaving him full freedom of action.

The advanced guard must be a force of all three arms,

In modern war it may well have to be itself an army of considerable strength, and its preliminary operations may be on a scale that in earlier days would be that of a great battle. Contact—it may be prolonged contact with the enemy and serious fighting—will take place before the moment comes to launch the decisive attack; and all the while the enemy must not only be held but watched and carefully reconnoitred. As Napoleon put it, a commander can adopt a sound plan of attack, only if he has "certain and true reports up to the moment of action." And for these he depends on his advanced guard.

Foch works out in detail the method of handling an advanced guard by making an elaborate study of one of the engagements in the war of 1866. He follows from hour to hour and illustrates with a series of elaborate maps the operations of a small force (seven battalions, two batteries, five squadrons)—the advanced guard of Steinmetz's army, as it marched into Austrian territory. Von Loewenstein, who commanded this detachment, had to seize the defile of Nachod in the hills that form the Bohemian frontier, and pushing out beyond it, cover the march of Steinmetz's army through the pass. He was attacked by a superior Austrian force, and held his own. His troops, by the way, belonged to a Polish corps of the Prussian army. They were good fighting men, and they had good leaders and a thoroughly competent commander. The Austrians blundered badly. The record of both success and blundering in war is full of useful lessons, when analysed by a master hand; and Foch not only works out the theory of how an advanced guard should be handled, but also incidentally conveys a number of most useful lessons as to the leading of

troops in action, the use of ground, the defence of woods and villages, the combination of the three arms. This is characteristic of his teaching. He keeps the main object of his lecture, its special topic clearly in view, but as occasion offers he does not hesitate to point out other lessons; and he does this so skilfully that the hearer or reader does not lose sight of the chief subject on account of these digressions. One cannot even attempt to summarize this study of the fight at Nachod. Its value depends on the mass of detailed facts that he skilfully marshals and makes the text of his comments. The chapter occupies just one-fifth of the whole volume of which it forms a part. That so much space is devoted to it shows the importance Foch attaches to this question of the advanced guard—the organization that ensures the essential condition of *sûreté* in the conduct of military operations whether on a large or on a small scale.

We may note two examples of what we have called his incidental teaching, points which have a direct bearing on all battle leading, but here are insisted on as specially concerning the fighting of an advanced guard.

First, as to the consumption of cartridges. The 2nd Battalion of the Thirty-seventh Prussian Infantry, who had to meet the most serious Austrian attack, twice during the morning stopped the enemy by its fire. But its average consumption of ammunition was only twenty-three cartridges for each man in the ranks—a striking proof of what can be accomplished by controlled and well-directed fire.

There is a still more important lesson as to losses in action. Foch's own words are worth quoting: "With modern weapons, which revealed their full power on the

battlefield of Nachod, we see that the Austrians suffered the most serious losses when they were retiring after the failure of their attacks, or when they were abandoning a lost position. It cost them less to advance to the attack or to hold their ground on the defensive. Hence we have the two principles that should hold the first place in modern tactics: *An attack, once begun, must be pushed on to the end: the defence must be maintained to the very last effort.* These are the methods that are the most economic. They must be the guide of those who carry out the operations, and also of those who direct them and command them. They imply the strictest obligation to recognize, to foresee, and to prepare for, the difficulties involved in the attack, and not to attempt it unless it can be pushed to the end; and in order to make this possible it must be organized and pushed forward under due protection, and prepared, supported, guarded, up to the last moment."

The study of the battle of Nachod has been used chiefly to show how *sûreté* is obtained by the use of the advanced guard covering the operations of a single line of march. This is an instance of tactical *sûreté.* Foch goes on to apply the same idea to the covering of operations in a wide theatre of war, where it is a question of obtaining the freedom of operation and the clear-sighted direction of armies and groups of armies. Here we have to obtain *sûreté strategique*—"strategic security." The lack of it involves all the perils of "strategical surprise." Foch takes as the historical examples on which he bases his teaching first, the German operations of August 16th, 1870,* resulting

* These operations are more fully dealt with by Foch in his *Conduite de la Guerre.*

in the battle of Rezonville (known in France as the Battle of Gravelotte and in some German histories as the Battle of Mars-la-Tour)—a case where the German headquarters was seriously involved in a dangerous fog of war, that might have led to disaster but for the hopelessly bad leadership on the French side. Then, as an example of "strategic security" obtained in difficult circumstances, he takes Napoleon's direction of Eugene's operations with the Army of Italy in the Hungarian campaign of 1809, an episode little known to most students of military history because it was a "side-show" while greater events were in progress. Finally, he takes a campaign that will always be of interest to English readers—the campaign of Waterloo —and studies the operations of Ziethen's Army Corps, on the line of the Sambre about Charleroi, on the day when Napoleon crossed the frontier. Ziethen had to gain time for the concentration of both the army of Blücher and that of Wellington. Every hour was important. Foch describes his leadership on that anxious day as "an example of dispositions that ensured strategic security." The Prussians had to make a fighting retreat in a confined space against the advance of a vastly superior force directed by the greatest master of war. Ziethen's operations are a splendid example of rearguard work. He made Waterloo possible, and foiled the great Emperor's well-conceived plan. And it is interesting to note that here we have Foch taking rearguard fighting as his final instance of how the "avant-garde" ensures *sûreté,* for the main fighting force. With Foch, as we have already noted, the advanced guard is any detachment engaged in this mission of *sûreté,* whatever be the direction in which it may be

facing or moving. The accidental position is nothing. The principle, the central idea, is what is important—namely that the smallest or the largest body of troops—everything from a company on the march to a group of armies—runs the continual risk of blundering, failure and destruction, unless it is covered by some kind of living screen that will provide it with the all-important *sûreté*. That is the first condition not merely of success but of continued existence as an organized force.

CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE

EVERY operation of war is intended to lead up to the decisive test of battle. The last three chapters of Foch's *Principes de la Guerre* are devoted to the subject. He treats it in less detail than the question of *sûreté*. He makes no attempt, indeed, to handle it exhaustively. He dwells chiefly on one point—the decisive attack.

In his preface to the first edition of the book he had been careful to state explicitly that it was not meant to be anything like a complete treatise on war, but only a discussion of certain of its aspects. In these closing chapters he insists only on the application of some of the principles he has already examined to the decisive effort on the battlefield. He has already, in the opening pages of his book, insisted on the all importance of the decisive battle, and in the course of his work he has repeatedly to touch upon battle tactics. He now sums up the guiding principles of command in the preliminary stages of a great battle and in its final act.

As one reads the pages, it is obvious that if they were now to be rewritten, they would be modified and supplemented in more than one point of detail. The principles would remain. There would be a fuller discussion of their application under the latest conditions of war. One chapter deals with "The Modern Battle." Written more than ten years before the Great War, and some

years before the prolonged Russo-Japanese battles of the Manchurian campaign, it does not anticipate battles prolonged over days and weeks, nor, again, the battles of the Western Front, fought upon one portion of a line that stretched from the sea to Switzerland, Foch foresaw, of course, that the battles of forthcoming wars would be fought on far extended fronts by enormous masses of troops and that they might well be prolonged day after day—as, for instance, Napoleon's battle of Leipzig had been. But various chapters indicate that he had still in mind the battle decided between sunrise and sunset, like most of the conflicts of the past.

In telling the story of his own leadership in the battles of the Great War, we shall be able to show how he demonstrated the application of his theory under the new conditions, not by words but by deeds, no longer in the lecture room but on the battlefield. Here we need only deal with the salient points of his theory as based upon the lessons of all military history, viewed under existing conditions when he was teaching at the École de Guerre and writing his first treatise on war.

He begins by sweeping aside what he describes as false ideas of what a decisive battle really is. It is not simply a great tragic drama of moving incidents, with a dénouement depending on some unforeseen event. It is not like the battles of peace manœuvres dependent on some scheme that regularly develops into an illustration of the employment of the three arms; nor is it made up of a number of local conflicts and efforts with a result depending on success being won in the whole or in the majority of these. To use a term taken from mechanics, victory in a decisive battle is not the sum total but the *resultant* of a number of combined efforts,

some of which may appear to those engaged in them to be failures. All nevertheless converge to produce the result; and this combination is the work of the commander who plans and directs the battle.

The battle, which Foch is analysing, is not one of the subsidiary engagements of a war. He refers to those with which he has already dealt more or less fully as examples to be studied in connection with the important problem of *sûreté,* and the operations of the advanced guard. All these had a restricted local object in view. Thus, for instance, at Nachod, the object of the advanced guard of Steinmetz's army, and the 5th Prussian Corps, was simply to obtain control of the exit from the defile for the long column that followed it—to open the gate into Bohemia. The object of the Austrians was to prevent this. Before Dijon, Von Kettler had simply to keep Garibaldi's army of the Vosges occupied, and observe, and hamper any attempt to move to the help of Bourbaki. On the Sambre about Charleroi, in 1815, Ziethen had simply to delay Napoleon's advance into Belgium, in order to gain time for the concentration of Blücher's and Wellington's armies. These were all preliminary operations, not the decisive trial of strength, the battle that marks an epoch in a campaign or settles what its final result shall be. None of these battles belong to the class of decisive events—like a Waterloo or a Sadowa or a Gravelotte. Foch is dealing with battles of this kind—days on which the commander seeks to obtain a decision by defeating and destroying the main battle force of the enemy, breaking down its will to conquer, imposing on it the sense of hopeless failure.

Such a battle, if it is to obtain this great result,

cannot be purely defensive. Speaking of the merely defensive,—"Such a battle," says Foch, "gives us neither a victorious nor a beaten side. It is simply a case of having to renew the conflict again."

So we must have the offensive, either from the outset or as the second stage of the fight after a preliminary defensive.

Every defensive battle, if it is to achieve a decisive result, must develop into a counter-attack.

This seems an obvious truth, but it has often been forgotten or disregarded, with fatal results for those who thus leave out of their calculations an elementary idea of war. This mistake vitiated the whole of the battle leading of the Imperial army of France, in 1870. There was a notable instance of it on August 16th, 1870, the day of the battle of Rezonville, when the German headquarters staff had blundered badly, and the French had a victory within their grasp. To make the matter clear, I may perhaps quote what I wrote in a popular work on the evolution of battle tactics since Crimean days up to the Balkan War of 1912:—

"German leadership in the Franco-German War was by no means perfect. It seemed to be so admirable, because on the whole it was good, and because that of the generals of the French army was abominably bad, except sometimes on the actual battlefield where their soldier courage and the quality of their men enabled them to make a good fight. But even there an unfortunate theory of the best tactics for the quick-firing breechloading rifle handicapped them throughout. The sound theory of Napoleon's days, which held its own still in the campaign of Magenta and Solferino, was that attack is the best form of defence, and the impetuous character of the French makes their attack formidable. Besides it is only by attacking that an enemy can be really

beaten. But with the coming of the breechloading rifle there had come also a new doctrine that the way to win battles was to 'sit tight' on a good position, preferably a line of high ground, and use the rapid fire to destroy the enemy as he attacked. 'The defensive is now superior' was the teaching of the French military schools. The Germans held by the sounder doctrine,—'Only the attack can give real results. It may be more costly than formerly, but the cost must be paid. To attack is to assert from the outset the sense of power and the determination to win.' For hours on this day of Rezonville, the French had in their hands the opportunity of gaining a great victory—if only they would attack. But this wretched theory of the superiority of the defence made it the ruling idea that all they had to do was to cling to the edge of the high ground near the Mars-la-Tour-Gravelotte road and repel the Prussian attack. A single German corps and some cavalry were opposed to all the army of the Rhine. But the French did not attack." *

Foch remarks that, if a sound theory of war had prevailed in France, in 1870, the engagements of August 14th and 16th would not have been claimed as victories. Like other battles of the time, they were simply engagements that might have been victories. The very phrase in fashion in those days in the official communiqués † and in the French press showed the influence of false theory. It used to be said that a victory had been won, because the troops had "maintained their positions." This, though the mere defensive, prepares the way for defeat, and a real victory can only be won by passing from defence to attack.

* *Famous Modern Battles*, p. 154.

† Foch is here facing and analysing the realities of war. Of course, in all countries during war there is a tendency in communiqués issued to the public to describe even indecisive actions as victories.

In one of those characteristic phrases where his own energetic spirit dictates the words, he remarks that "action is the first law of war. . . . Of all mistakes only one is disgraceful—inaction. We must seek to create the course of events, not merely be passively subject to them; and above all we must organize the attack, everything else becoming subordinate to it, and having no claim for consideration except from the point of view of the advantage that may result from it for the attack."

Here speaks the vigorous mind, that in the darkest days of the Great War, the most critical moments, thought only of striking back. These were the ideas with which, at the École de Guerre, he inspired the future leaders of the French army; and this teaching contributed in no small degree to make the armies of France in the war that began in 1914 so different from the armies of 1870.

How is this decisive battle, this attack that is to break down the enemy's fighting spirit, to be organized? Foch divides up his ideal battle into three stages—the preparatory action, the decisive attack, the pursuit that enlarges and secures the result.

The battle is not to be regarded as a series of individual contests, battalion against battalion, brigade against brigade. It is a combination of these efforts by the commander. Its decisive result does not depend on one side or the other suffering greater material losses. It depends on the defeated side—even though it may have suffered less material damage—being in the military sense of the word "demoralized." It has lost the spirit and hope that make further successful resistance possible; hence the saying Foch quotes with approval from Joseph de Maistre: "A lost battle is a battle that

one believes to be lost, for a battle is not lost from the mere material standpoint." Hence, too, Foch's maxim: "A battle won is a battle in which one refuses to admit that one is beaten," and Frederick the Great's saying: "The most obstinate wins—that is the true source of success."

So Foch insists upon what he describes as the moral element in victory. Material force is used directly to inflict loss and destruction on the enemy, but the ultimate object is to break down his fighting spirit—to produce a moral not a material effect. So he quotes from Von der Goltz: "The object in view is not so much to destroy the enemy's fighting men, as to destroy their courage. Victory is on your side as soon as you have given the enemy the conviction that the cause is lost. . . . One's opponent is defeated, not by complete and individual annihilation, but by destroying his hope of victory."

Hence the idea so frequently recurred to by Foch of the "will to conquer"—a necessity for every soldier, but above all for him who commands.

In discussing the task of the commander-in-chief, and the qualities that fit him for it, Foch puts in the first place his confident determination to succeed and the power of inspiring others with it. He takes as a typical example a soldier that one would hardly expect a French writer would choose for the purpose. It is one more instance of the impartial scientific spirit with which he regards the facts of military history. He points to Blücher, and describes Scharnhorst's choice of him to command the Prussian army, in 1813, as a stroke of genius. In Court circles in Prussia the choice met with opposition. Blücher was described as a stupid

old man, broken with illness and only half-educated. But his name was popular with the soldiers; he could make any demands upon them with the certainty that they would give him their utmost effort. "Whatever he may have lacked on the intellectual side," says Foch, "he had a will, impassioned energy of mind that never tired, never was at rest, and with which he drew the nations into the war, and their armies on to victory, as he drew on to Paris the sovereigns in spite of themselves, in spite at least of one of them, the Austrian Emperor, who certainly was not bent on dethroning his son-in-law or making his daughter a widow—and a crownless widow. Have we not here enough of determined will, energy and power of command, to justify Scharnhorst in his choice?"

Without giving any indication of the examples that he has in mind, Foch goes on to say that one sees the influence of the commander's will on whole multitudes of men at those wonderful moments "when without knowing why, an army on the battlefield feels itself carried forward as if it were gliding down an inclined plane."

He becomes enthusiastic in his description of the ideal commander and his influence on the events of war. The first condition of success is to have such a man in command; everything depends on this. "No victory is possible without a vigorous commander, ready for responsibility, eager for daring enterprises, himself possessing and inspiring in others the determination and energy that will go through to the end—nothing will be won without his personal action, based on will, judgment, freedom of mind in the midst of danger. These are the natural qualities of the gifted man, the born

general, but advantages that can be acquired by effort and by thought in the case of the average man."

History is full of instances of the failure of armies through the lack of even average qualities for command in their chiefs. In the battles round Metz, in August, 1870, officers and men fought bravely, but never had a chance of victory, because they had a commander who had not the "will to conquer," who thought only of defence not attack. Disasters like these, remarks Foch, are not accidents, but the inevitable result of the lack of moral qualities in the command.

The effort on which the commander depends for giving effect to his "will to conquer" is the decisive attack. What is the special character he will seek to give to it? Terror is the force that breaks down the opponent's power of resistance, and the most potent agency in producing terror is surprise. How is this to find a place in the great operations of war? Ambuscades and the other devices of war on a small scale are clearly out of the question. But what is possible, what the great leaders from Napoleon downwards have again and again accomplished on the battlefield is the sudden intervention of a superior striking force at a chosen point in the opposing line, the attack being driven home so rapidly and effectually that the enemy has not the time to collect a reserve with which to parry the blow. This was the central idea of Napoleon's battle leading. We find him explaining it to one of his marshals, Gouvion St.-Cyr, and reducing it almost to a set formula. One engages the enemy all along the front. It is best not to be anxious about the good or bad fortune of the units thus in action, or to yield too readily to requests for help sent by their chiefs. As the days go on and the

enemy is becoming wearied with the struggle, and has engaged most of his reserves, a mass of infantry, cavalry and artillery is got together suddenly and hurled against one point in his front, so as to make what Napoleon called the great event of the battle; and speaking to St.-Cyr, he added that thus he had almost always been successful. Foch takes as a typical instance of success thus obtained the advance of Macdonald's column at the battle of Wagram, the huge mass of fifty battalions (twenty-two thousand, five hundred men), suddenly bearing down on the Austrian line, its attack prepared by the fire of a hundred guns, and heralded and partly screened by a charge of forty squadrons of cavalry. What did the infantry do? It had hardly any fire effect on account of the column formation. As for its twenty thousand bayonets, not one of them inflicted the loss of a man upon the enemy. The column itself suffered heavy loss from hostile fire as it advanced. But before the steady advance of the column, the Austrian line broke, without waiting to cross bayonets with the attack. Moral not material collapse gave the French the victory. Before the sudden appearance of Macdonald and the onward march of his mass of bayonets the Austrians were seized with the feeling that they were in the presence of a force they could not resist—that resistance would end in their destruction. Nothing else on the battlefield mattered. Napoleon had struck the decisive blow.

Here we have the typical *manœuvre battle* with the result depending on the decided and decisive action of the chief command. It differs essentially from what Foch calls the *parallel battle*—the clash between two lines, in which the various units on each side—bat-

talions, brigades, divisions—are all striving, each on its part of the field, to obtain a local success without any central directing mind organizing the supreme effort. There are local attacks, while the reserves are employed piecemeal to reinforce those parts of the line that need help. It is quite true that in such battles victories have been won that gave great results. But this depends on the chapter of accidents, the inspiration of some local leader, the energetic attack of this or that unit. The essential weakness of the attack in such a battle is that it tends to become a uniform pressure all along the line, that is nowhere a pressure sufficient to reach the crushing point of stress. It meets with an equally uniform resistance, probably a superior resistance because the defence can fortify its ground and in other ways improve its position. So we may easily find the attack becoming like a rising tide washing harmlessly against a solid breakwater.

But Foch points out that if we can find a fissure in the solid obstacle opposed to us, a "point of insufficient resistance," and push into it the organized attack on this selected spot, or if we can make the fissure and break the resistance by substituting at one point, instead of the regular pressure of the rising tide, a blow like that of a battering-ram, a breach is made and the hostile line can be swept away. Here we have the essential feature of the manœuvre battle.

We shall see how Foch, a few years later, reduced this theory to practice, how he found the fissure in the German line at the battle of the Marne and drove his attack into it, and how in operations on a far larger scale he marked down the weak point in the hostile front, when the Germans were again pouring towards

the Marne, and launched his battering-ram blow against it, on July 18th, 1918.

The manœuvre battle is, then, the battle that is under the commander's control, in which he has a definite plan, and carries it out with definite purpose in view, determined to control events not merely wait upon them. The "keystone" of the battle is the decisive attack. All else is subsidiary to it. To have in hand the necessary force for this decisive event, the economy of force must be kept in view in all the other operations of the battle-field.

In the parallel, the reserves are a kind of magazine, from which to draw fresh supplies of men and guns, now for this, now for that part of the line. In the manœuvre battle, they are the force organized to produce the decision. Foch notes that, in the war of 1870, the French army fought only parallel battles. The French Staff apparently had forgotten the very idea of the manœuvre battle of Napoleonic days and did not realize that the Germans were employing the principle against them. The French official communiqués used to tell of the arrival of German reinforcements, which decided the battle against them. They did not understand that the appearance of these new forces was nothing but the launching of the organized decisive attack.

In the battle there will usually be a considerable amount of fighting, before the attack can be delivered or the moment is ripe for it. First, touch is gained with the enemy's positions and he is held and kept occupied all along the front. This requires a considerable aggregate force, and, it may be, a long time. In fact, this subsidiary and preparatory engagement will probably

take up the greater part of the time that the battle lasts, and the greater part of the force available for it. Hence what Foch calls the "optical delusion" of regarding this as the principal part of the battle and the whole affair as a parallel battle. While all this is in progress, the real event of the day is being prepared, the act that really counts and on which the whole depends, though its execution may take up a shorter time and only a minor part of the army that is in action.

Foch illustrates this by a detailed study of a manœuvre battle of the Napoleonic wars. Instead of taking as the subject for his careful study one of the Emperor's great manœuvre battles, he selects the victory of Lannes at Saalfeld in the opening days of the Jena campaign (1806). He chose it, perhaps, because it was easier to make clear to his audience all the detailed mechanism of the preparation and the decisive attack carried out on this small scale, than to trace the whole course of one of the more famous battles that decided the fate of nations. Saalfeld itself could not count as a decisive victory in the sense of settling the fortunes of a campaign; but it was locally decisive, for it ended in the destruction of the Prussian force that was engaged. And Lannes was a leader whose methods are worth studying. Napoleon himself spoke of him as the ablest of all his marshals. Foch remarks that, if the same battle had to be fought to-day on the same ground, it would be difficult to improve upon the plan adopted by Lannes.

After having thus explained the conditions of success in battle and the theory of the preparatory or "holding" engagement all along the front, the decisive attack at the selected point—the theory of the manœuvre

battle, Foch outlines the application of the theory on the modern battlefield.

He returns to the idea of the advanced guard gaining touch, reconnoitring, feeling, holding the enemy, until the main striking mass can be hurled upon his line. But there is no rigid pseudo-mathematical formula of "pivotting squares" and the like, no attempt to reduce the vast conflicts of the armies of our time to the pattern of Napoleon's comparatively small army in the campaign of Jena. The forces first engaged against the hostile front have a task analogous to that of the advanced guard, but a more onerous and difficult task than that of the vanguards of earlier wars. They will have to obtain more precise and more abundant information, resist the enemy's efforts for a longer time, put forth more serious exertions to hold him to the ground. While preparing the attack that he hopes to make decisive, the commander-in-chief will have to oppose the enemy wherever he shows himself, and do this with forces that keep him occupied and hold him in check as long as the stage of preparation lasts. He must provide all that is needed for this purpose, while endeavouring to keep in hand the largest possible force for the supreme effort. There is and must be a still earlier stage of preparation, before the actual battle begins—the grouping of the larger units, the direction of their lines of march, with a view to the intended battle. Thus, in 1870, we see Von Moltke planning a great battle against the French army on the line of the Sarre for August 9th, a battle which the course of events rendered impossible. Three armies were to combine their operations. Two were to attack in front and hold the French army; the third, that of the Crown Prince, coming up from the Vosges, was to

make the flank attack, the decisive blow. It was to be another Sadowa, on the same plan but on a vaster scale. The preparation began with the first advance to the frontier, days before.

Once the actual engagement begins, the troops put into the fighting line must "immobilize" the enemy; they must act on the offensive, ready to act, if he tries to press forward or develop a serious attack, but endeavouring to keep him so well occupied that it will not be easy for him to dispose freely of his own units.

The special objects of attack will be the seizure of strong points and their consolidation, and this either with a view to making it easier to hold the enemy or directly to prepare the way for the main attack. The preparatory battle thus becomes a series of local engagements; all have one general purpose, but the commander must necessarily leave the immediate direction of them to his subordinates. He assigns to each his sphere of action and his special task; and within these limits the local engagement might again be analysed into the preparation and the local decisive attack.

This preparatory engagement may last a long time and assume the aspect of a series of conflicts that in the wars of the past would have ranked as great battles. Foch goes into some detail as to the part to be played by the three arms, and their mutual support. He dwells on the importance—the ever increasing importance—of cover, and suggests that even the supports, the reserves of the fighting line, should entrench their ground, so as to prepare positions for a rally and a stand in case of things going badly in front. There is a hint of the modern developments of artillery barrage fire in the

remark that the guns will seek to produce a danger zone all round the objective of the attack.

There is a warning against making the preparatory action or series of actions mere "demonstrations." It must be pressed with energy and with an ever increasing energy. To talk to soldiers of a "demonstration" is only to slacken their efforts and depress their morale. Troops once under fire must exert their utmost efforts. An attack once begun must be driven home; a defence maintained to the last.

So we have the battle in progress. If all goes well, the enemy is being held, his first lines are being driven in, advanced posts captured. There is a watch for any sign of a coming attempt on his part to make a serious counter-attack, and the means are at hand to oppose it and at least delay the development. If on the whole things are going well, the preparation is satisfactory. As Napoleon said to Gouvion St.-Cyr, one need not worry much about local failures. There need not be success everywhere. We shall see later how calmly Foch himself faced a series of local failures in the battle of the Marne. It was enough for him that his line held together, though losing ground. It delayed the enemy long enough to enable him to organize and find the opening for his decisive attack.

This is the really important element in the battle. If it succeeds all is won and local losses count for nothing.

Foch has in his mind attacks modelled on those of the Napoleonic wars and the war of 1870, in his outline of the tactics to employ in this attack. But though some details of execution may be modified in applying the scheme to the battles of to-day, the principle and the general direction remain the same. There is the bring-

ing up of the troops to be engaged, so that they may suffer as little as possible in the distant zone, where they can inflict no loss in return but must simply endure the enemy's fire—the concentration under cover, and, as far as may be, veiled from the enemy's observation. This last point is now secured by movement by night, quartering in wooded districts and in buildings, and above all by the aircraft securing supremacy above the front, and depriving the enemy of the help of aerial reconnaissance. This is one instance of the way in which the general rules and principles set forth by Foch, in 1901, hold good, subject to modification of detail arising out of more recent conditions.

The attack is prepared by an intense artillery fire from as many guns as can be brought into action. "There cannot be too many; there never are enough," remarks Foch, himself an artillery officer.

The attack is started on its advance as near as possible to the enemy's positions. The troops already engaged here have prepared the way and done the work of the advanced guard. A second line is ready to carry it forward, if the advance of the first is checked. Guns are pushed on in immediate support of the infantry. The flanks of the advance are watched and guarded. A reserve is kept in hand to deal with any counter-attack, especially when the enemy's front is broken through and the confusion of victory has arisen. Meanwhile everywhere the troops in line are pressing the enemy with their utmost effort—to keep him fully occupied and paralyse his efforts to handle his reserves.

The advance of the attack depends on a steady forward movement, a rapid movement using fire effect, but aiming at coming finally and as soon as possible to hand

grips with the enemy. Success depends on this resolution to get to close quarters. It is the menace of the actual shock that will make the opponent give way. Once there is a breach in the hostile lines, it must be maintained and enlarged against the enemy's efforts to close it. As his line gives way, the pursuit begins, with the cavalry and everything else that is still available.

Such, in brief outline, is the ideal attack. The choice of the point, against which it is to be directed, will be determined by a variety of considerations. A weak point in the enemy's line, the existence of ground that offers for the advance freedom from obstacles and presence of cover: the fact that on this front there is the best region for the preparation of the attack and the concentration of the attacking force: the strategic gain of being able to move against a flank and menace a line of communication and retreat. Sometimes there will be little or no choice of alternatives. The existing situation, the nature of the ground, the available lines of concentration and advance may make it impossible to attack anywhere else but on one given point.

We have in the operations of 1918 a perfect example of the decisive battle and the decisive attack, such as Foch imagined and described it—an example all the more interesting because we can see so clearly the modifications of tactical detail arising from new weapons while the principles applied remain the same. General Allenby's victory in central Palestine, that destroyed a whole hostile army and opened the way to Damascus, was this perfectly organized battle. It was won in a "side-show" of the Great War, and there were greater battles on both the Western and Eastern Fronts; but none had such strikingly complete and far-reaching

results. We have the preparation. Touch is gained with the long Turkish line stretching from the sea far into the Samarian hills, and away to the Jordan valley. The advanced guard, here including an aerial vanguard of flying men that has won the local supremacy of the air, provides *sûreté* in the double sense of safety from surprise and sure knowledge of the situation. The decisive attack is prepared on the seaward flank. Here there are good communications for bringing up and supplying the troops to be engaged, good cover, sufficient to conceal the presence of the mass from any reconnaissance on the ground, while the airmen prevent its being reconnoitred from above. It smashes through the Turkish right like a battering-ram. The cavalry pour through the breach thus opened. The whole enemy line collapses in the effort to effect a retreat with the pursuer's mounted troops already well to its rear. The beaten army, utterly disorganized, surrenders here and there by tens of thousands and all the ways northward into Syria are open to the victor.

CHAPTER VI

CRITICISM OF GERMAN LEADERSHIP

FOCH'S second book, *De la Conduite de la Guerre,* published in 1905, deals specially with the direction of a campaign by the general headquarters of an army; and he takes as the subject of his study the operations of the German armies in 1870, up to August 18th. This was the day of the battle of Gravelotte (St. Privat), which closed the first phase of the campaign and was one of the decisive events of the war, for it resulted in Bazaine's army being shut up in Metz.

Apart from its interest as a study of the work of the headquarters staff in directing the combined operations of three large armies, the book had a special value of its own for the readers for whom it was primarily written. It was based on lectures already given at the École de Guerre, and intended to make the teaching they conveyed accessible to a still larger audience in the French army. It was exceedingly useful that French officers should realize that the German victories in 1870 were not due to any supremely wise and perfect direction of their armies.

After the war of 1870, there had arisen, not only in Germany but also in other countries a kind of legend of the efficiency of Moltke's leadership in the war. According to this widely accepted version of the course of events, Moltke worked upon a plan of campaign that had all the deadly efficiency of the opening and the

series of moves made by a master player at the chess board. The German cavalry were everywhere out in front of the advance, keeping the headquarters informed of every movement of the French. Their reports were made the basis of orders that directed overwhelming masses with the certainty of fate against the weak points of the enemy. The whole campaign went like clockwork.

This popular legend of the German leadership was to a great extent fostered in the early years after the war by the official history issued by the General Staff at Berlin, under Von Moltke's editorship, and translated into all the chief European languages. It admitted few failures. It found a plausible reason for the action taken by the Staff on every occasion. It glossed over or concealed any weakness on the part of subordinate leaders. Most of the story it told was true enough, for the Germans had generally scored heavily in the war. National pride, the desire to make the most of success, the reluctance to censure the leaders who had shared the success, was the reason for reticence here, exaggeration there, and for special pleading in many places. While Von Moltke remained chief of the Staff, there was no inclination for any German officer to criticize the history very closely.

The French official history, prepared by the Section Historique of the General Staff at Paris, was not begun until more than a quarter of a century after the war. By that time, serious criticism of the German official story and the tradition based on it had begun, and made considerable progress in Germany itself.

The pioneer of the new group of military writers in Germany, who laid the foundation of a truer view, was

Captain Hoenig, who had himself served on the Staff during the war. After retiring from the army, he devoted himself to military journalism and literature. Regimental histories, dealing with the operations of 1870, were appearing; and Hoenig, comparing their evidence with the official narrative, began to point out that the latter was not always reliable. Then he ventured on more daring criticism, and his pamphlet, *Twenty-four Hours of Moltke's Strategy,* dealing with the battles before Metz, caused a sensation. It was a frankly realistic narrative of defective leadership that nearly ended in disaster. After this other writers came into the field, dealing in the same candid fashion with the facts; and the General Staff itself published new documents, supplementary memoirs that threw much light on the operations of 1870. Much of this new material was translated into French, and military writers in France and other countries dealt with it.

Foch was not, therefore, announcing or assuming to denounce any new discovery, when at the École de Guerre and in his work *De la Conduite de la Guerre* he examined the leadership of the German General Staff in 1870, and pointed out its failings.

But he did this in no narrow carping spirit. The same work on page after page bears testimony to the efficiency of the German command. Foch shows, indeed, how the soundness of Moltke's original plan for the opening of the campaign, the high average of military spirit and knowledge among the subordinate leaders, their readiness to take responsibility and act on their own initiative in the general direction indicated by headquarters, secured for the German army far-reaching successes. No French writer has given more

generous praise to the soldierly qualities of the German leaders of 1870-71 than this French teacher of the art of war. There is in Foch none of the narrow-minded bitterness that blinds its victim to the good qualities of a successful antagonist.

But at the same time—not to depreciate the genius of Moltke, but to guard the future soldiers of France against a like failing—he puts his hand upon and analyses the weak point of Moltke's system. He shows too how the French army of the Rhine, in August, 1870, outnumbered as it was and heavily handicapped by defective organization and a slow and inefficient mobilization, had nevertheless the chance of victory, if its chiefs had known how to profit by the mistakes of their opponents and had seized the opportunities of success thus offered to them. France was defeated in the battles of August, 1870, not on account of inferior numbers or a less powerful artillery, but through the lack of military knowledge and a sound theory of war among the leaders of the Imperial army.

This was a valuable lesson to teach to the future chiefs of the French army. It served to destroy the last vestige of the old tradition of an almost superhuman efficiency and invincible battle power on the side of Germany. It brought out in a brilliant light the supreme importance of the knowledge of war. It showed that even in the darkest hours of a campaign there was no need to despair of success. One could still wait and watch for the opportunities that even an adversary equal to Von Moltke might give for deadly counter-attack in order to turn back the tide of war.

Foch in his book is studying the higher mechanism of a campaign, the work of the Staff in directing the com-

bined operations of great armies. There is abundant documentary material for such a study of what went on at the German General Headquarters, in 1870. Such a study can only be attempted when the lapse of years has made the full evidence available. But besides the voluminous records of what went on day by day and even hour by hour at headquarters in the eventful days of August, 1870, there is probably the fullest and most accurate evidence as to what was passing hour by hour in both the French and the German armies. The German Staff history, the supplementary memoirs, the great library of individual narratives of officers who took part in the operations, the regimental histories and reports and finally the elaborate studies of operations and battles published by highly competent military writers both in France and Germany, provide a mass of detailed evidence which, coupled with the possession of elaborate maps of the ground, enable the military student to reconstitute the whole situation, or any part of it as it actually was at any given moment. There is no war for which so much historical material is available, except perhaps the campaign of Waterloo. It will be many years before it will be possible to have such complete material for the study of the Great War that began in 1914.

There are two ways of studying and setting forth the history of a campaign or a battle.

One may reckon up the forces on both sides, note their organization, their positions at the outset of the operation or the battle, follow the course of events step by step, marshalling the facts referring to both the opposing armies. The student or the reader has thus throughout a complete knowledge of the general course of

events; he sees more and knows more than anyone who was actually engaged in the operations—even more than the opposing commanders.

The other method is to follow the course of the operations from the standpoint of one side in the conflict, usually from that of the commander; to try to show what information he possessed as to the enemy's position, movements and plans; how he obtained this information and sought to verify or supplement it; what orders he gave, based on this knowledge; how these orders were carried out.

This is at once a more realistic and more scientific method. It also conveys the most valuable practical lessons. It shows what are the conditions under which armies operate in the field, how their chiefs have to direct them in spite of the "fog of war."

This is the method which Foch adopts in his masterly work, *De la Conduite de la Guerre.* Of course, he also gives his readers the actual facts as to the position from day to day, in order to show how far the idea of it on which Moltke's plans were based corresponded with or deviated from the reality, and to suggest also how the opportunities—given even by such an opponent as the German chief of the Staff—could have been used by more efficient leaders on the French side.

In the introductory chapters, Foch describes and discusses the German plan of campaign. He makes a very important addition to the doctrine set forth in a maxim by Clausewitz, that the objective of a commander will be the enemy's main fighting force. It is quite true that the destruction of this main army will be the primary object of the operations, but there will usually be another objective to be taken into account, namely, the

occupation of territory, or of some important point such as the enemy's capital. This is not a return to the eighteenth century idea of making mere geographical gains—the capture of cities, the occupation of positions—the chief objects in view, the decisive gains of a campaign. The capital may be chosen as the point to be aimed at, where—as, for instance, in a centrally organized country like France—its seizure, after the defeat of the main field army, would tend to paralyse further organized resistance. The loss of Paris meant the downfall of Napoleon, in 1814. But not all capitals have, or have at all times this dominant importance. Napoleon's seizure of Madrid was the beginning of the Spanish national resistance to his aggression. His capture of Moscow, in 1812, with the Russian army still keeping the field, was no real advantage to him. There may be another kind of local objective, such as the occupation of districts from which the enemy's army would draw its resources for reorganization, such as manufacturing regions or the ports on which he depends for oversea help. All this is very different from the mere seizure of territory for its own sake. In 1870, the German plan included besides the defeat of the French army of operations, the investment and capture of Paris as a means of disorganizing the French power of resistance, and the driving of what might be left of armed forces beyond the Loire, so as to cut off the north of France, the rich industrial region on which so much of the resources of the country depends.

The plan of campaign must, and can only, include the general idea of the objectives to be aimed at, and the placing of the armies in presence of each other for the first trial of strength. Future developments must be

planned according to the results of this opening of the gigantic game. These first operations are all-important. The whole course of the war may depend upon them. They may indeed be decisive.

Von Moltke's plan, based on the general lines marked out in a plan drawn up for the Prussian Staff by Clausewitz, many years earlier, took its final shape in the winter of 1869 and the spring of 1870. Foch gives it the highest praise so far as its broad principles are concerned, and only criticizes certain details of their application. It is not mere retrospective criticism, but is made the basis of practical lessons for the future.

It is not possible to condense into a few pages these criticisms of the plan and its working out in the campaign that followed. Nor is there here any need to attempt such a summary of Foch's teaching. All that is sought in this examination of his writings is to give a general idea of his theory of war, of his method of presenting it, and of his own characteristics as a teacher and a leader, revealed by his treatment of the subject. Certain points in his criticisms are specially worthy of note, inasmuch as they make clearer the teaching of his earlier work, *Des Principes de la Guerre,* and throw light on his generalship in the Great War.

Much of his criticism of Moltke's staff work in 1870 has a character of its own, and represents a scientific advance beyond what had been insisted upon by earlier writers on the same subject. We have seen how all-important in Foch's system is the idea of *sûreté* in its double sense of provision for security and sureness as to the situation that has to be dealt with. This is the double condition that ensures freedom of action for the commander, enabling him to direct his operations with

out being dominated by the action of the enemy, so that he preserves his initiative. It is also the guide to rightly directed action on his own part.

Now his main criticism of the German leadership of August, 1870, is that the measures taken by Von Moltke were deficient in this first requirement of making an adequate provision for *sûreté*.

Von Moltke's plan was based upon a concentration of three armies west of the Rhine, in the Bavarian Palatinate, between the river and the French frontier. This huge fighting force, concentrated in one great mass, would directly protect Germany from any French advance from Lorraine and the region of Metz. The Rhine frontier, facing Strasburg and Alsace was left almost open. It was watched only by small detachments. But it was indirectly guarded by the concentration further north. For if—as was actually the first idea at the headquarters of Napoleon III—the French attempted to invade south Germany by crossing the Rhine from Alsace, they would lay themselves open to a deadly blow against their flank and line of communications, a blow to be delivered by the concentrated mass in the Palatinate. So far Foch gives the scheme his highest praise. It was simple and practical, and provided for the union of all available forces for the main operations, reducing detachments for other purposes to the minimum. It was a fine example of the economy of force, the concentration of battle power upon one point to decide the issue.

But now we come to the weak points in the detailed elaboration of the plan and its execution. Von Moltke could count upon a marked superiority of numbers once his concentration was completed. It would take eight

days, before the mobilization was complete; the transportation of troops by rail to the point of concentration would then begin. What would happen during the time—about a fortnight—of mobilization plus concentration? What would the French be doing? Foch gives us the text of Moltke's memorandum on the various plans of action that were open to them.

To put the matter in popular language, what most concerned him was that the Imperial army of France had a very large force actually under arms when war was declared. The French army system of the time depended on a large standing army in camps and barracks with a very insufficient reserve to be called out on the declaration of war, and second line of the Garde Mobile, which as yet existed chiefly on paper. The German system meant a relatively small force under arms in peace time, to be expanded into the war army by calling up large reserves. Further, it was a fixed principle that army corps must not move to the concentration front until the reserves had joined and received their equipment and the field transport had been completed on a war footing. Now, Napoleon III had large garrisons in Metz and Strasburg, an army at Châlons in the permanent training camp—the Aldershot of France—a strong garrison, including the Imperial Guard, in and about Paris, besides considerable garrisons at Lyons and other important centres. If the troops already in the east of France, the Châlons and Paris troops and forces from other large centres, were rushed up by rail to the frontier, there would be, even before the reserves joined, an army about Metz and Strasburg, stronger than any force that would have been available on the German side while the mobilization was in progress or

in the first days of the concentration. The French might attempt to secure a first success, and disorganize the German concentration by a dash into the Palatinate.

Von Moltke provided for this contingency by directing that the front on which the three armies were to concentrate was not to be the frontier but a line a considerable distance to the rear of it. The border would be watched by a mere outpost line of small detachments, which would give timely alarm of a French irruption. This might take place at any time after the first week or eight days. The troops already on the concentration line would retire. The points where the rest of the army would detrain would be moved back to the Rhine. As the French advanced, they would have a continually growing force in front of them. At latest, on the fourteenth day of the war, the German concentration would be complete, and battle would be offered to the French invader on German ground with overwhelmingly superior forces.

And now we have an interesting glimpse of the inner working of the German Intelligence Department.* A Staff officer, Major Krause, had been sent to Berne, in Switzerland, to collect information as to what was happening in France, from travellers, secret service agents, and the newspapers. It was a perfectly legitimate proceeding. Every belligerent collects information with the help of the facilities afforded by neutral countries. On July 22nd—when the war had not yet lasted a week—Krause was able to telegraph to the Headquarters Staff, still at Berlin, that the French were concentrating about Metz and Strasburg, and transporting their troops to

* *Conduite de la Guerre*, p. 93.

these centres without waiting for the reservists to join.

Von Moltke at once made up his mind as to the significance of this news. "It was not to be supposed," he writes, "that the enemy would thus give up the advantage of regular mobilization and the preliminary organization of his forces, if he had not in view some great result to be thus secured. One had therefore good reason to suppose that the French were rapidly collecting all their available forces with a view to crossing the frontiers of Rhenish Prussia and the Palatinate to oppose the concentration of the German armies on the left bank of the Rhine. Whatever might be the ultimate result of such tactics, this constituted a danger that must be provided against."

Foch makes a remark on this, that is worth remembering: "People, who themselves reason soundly, often make the mistake of supposing that others also act in the same way. So we find Moltke drawing an inexact conclusion from a sound line of argument."

The mobilization was still in progress; the transport of troops by rail had not begun. Moltke at once ordered the detraining points and the line of concentration to be moved back to the Rhine.

But the French were not moving forward. They were incapable of any movement on a grand scale; for the masses of troops they were assembling in Alsace and Lorraine were as yet only partly equipped, badly supplied and short of field transport. All was confusion on the French side of the frontier. The news from Berne and Von Moltke's deduction from it made up a false alarm, the result of which was to delay the first move of the campaign.

Foch points out that all this was the result of the lack

of any efficiently organized system of *sûreté.* The weak detachments—mere handfuls placed here and there to watch the frontier, with no support behind them—were no real protection. If the French had sent even a comparatively small cavalry force across the border, these detachments could neither hold it, nor put up such a resistance as would compel the invader to show whether there was anything behind the cavalry. It might be a reconnaissance, a raid or the first wave of an invasion. Small detachments, retiring before the French horsemen, could not clear up the question. But a force of all arms, an advanced guard of cavalry, artillery and infantry, covering the concentration region could force the adversary to show his hand and reveal his intentions.

As matters stood, the German operations could have been adversely influenced and delayed by mere demonstration of French cavalry. They were thus influenced, although the French never made a move during the first fortnight of the war—influenced and hampered by a mere report and a theory built upon it. Foch points to this, as one more instance of what may happen, when there is no due provision to ensure *sûreté,* and the freedom of action that depends upon it.

At the time when he wrote, a new system had been adopted by all the great military powers of the Continent—the system of maintaining even in peace time, on frontiers that might become the scene of warlike operations, army corps and specially organized divisions kept nearly at war strength. These *troupes de couverture* would, on a declaration of war, play the part of a strategic advanced guard, covering the mobilization and concentration.

Continuing his survey of the German operations of 1870, Foch gives us a singularly clear and interesting study of the general scheme for detraining corps and divisions brought up to a war frontier. He shows how well Von Moltke combined the forward movement of troops already detrained with a gradual advance of the points, at which those still arriving would be transferred from the troop trains to the roads. The loss of time caused by the sudden withdrawal of the concentration to the Rhine, was thus partly made good. The weak point was still that the operation was not sufficiently protected. It owed its smooth execution to the disorganization of the French concentration and the consequent inaction of the Imperial army.

This inaction continued up to the beginning of August. Then, at last, the French did something. August 2nd saw the action at Sarrebruck, a little battle, fought apparently with very vague ideas of what it was to lead up to, and chiefly with the object of impressing and satisfying public opinion in France. It was the Prince Imperial's "baptism of fire"; it was the first trial in action of the new mitrailleuses, which had been described in advance as fearful engines of destruction, talismans of victory. Imaginative correspondents of the Paris newspapers told how the new guns had torn deep lanes of slaughter in the Prussian masses; as a plain matter of fact, there were no masses in action on the German side, only a thin line of skirmishers, and the mitrailleuses fired off a tremendous quantity of ammunition with trifling effect against such a target. The small detachment, watching the frontier line, fell back fighting, and Sarrebruck was occupied. The affair was celebrated in France as a great victory.

No writer, French, German or neutral, has ever described this "Battle of Sarrebruck" in more scathing terms than those employed by Foch. A French army corps (the Second under Frossard) was deployed for battle. "These masses," says Foch, "encountered two companies and then a battalion (Second Battalion of the Forty-sixth Infantry) and these were soon in retreat, after losing four officers and seventy-nine men. Such was the affair of Sarrebruck, which has been ironically but justly described as a battle of three divisions against three companies, or a manœuvre against a skeleton or marked enemy."

Such as it was, the affair caused some anxiety to the German headquarters. Von Moltke's orders show that he regarded it as possibly heralding an invasion of Germany. He had no organized force that could at once maintain touch with the French. Once more the want of an advanced guard introduced some trouble into his arrangements.

On August 4th, he was at last ready to act. After Sarrebruck, the French had relapsed into their former inactivity. They too had taken no precautions to secure their still incomplete concentration. The result was a surprise and a series of defeats.

Once more, Foch points out that the German march into France had no general advanced guard to cover it—to gain touch with the enemy, hold him, and enable whatever blow was struck against him to be directed with security from interruption and sure knowledge of his dispositions. There was no adequate provision for the all-important *sûreté*.

Each of the German columns had its own local advanced guard—but the general movement of the whole

force of three great armies was covered only by a cavalry screen. Cavalry patrols, supported by formed bodies of mounted men, are a first line of protection, and essential for the purpose of "exploration" and reconnaissance, but they are only one element in a properly organized advanced guard. There must be a force of infantry and artillery behind them and working with them. Otherwise against an active enemy they are insufficient. They can be held up or driven in. Organized resistance of even a small force of all arms can paralyse their action and make it impossible for them to obtain the information that is demanded of them. If the enemy advances, they cannot bring him seriously to action, and so are unable to distinguish between a mere local counter-attack and the beginning of an advance in force.

Contrast with the unsupported cavalry screen, feeling its way amid the "fog of war", Napoleon's method, as for instance in the campaign of Jena, where, although Murat's huge force of cavalry was covering the advance across the Thuringian hills, there was also the advanced guard formed by the Army Corps of Lannes. For the want of such an advanced guard, the German Headquarters Staff, relying entirely on the imperfect information supplied by even the most enterprising of the cavalry patrols, was again and again unable to see clearly through the war fog. Foch shows how Von Moltke, instead of being able to act upon a sure knowledge of what the French positions and movements really were based his plans and orders on suppositions.

He adopted, in fact, a system that at first sight seems sound enough. He took it for granted that the French generals would take the course that a sound knowledge

of the situation seemed to indicate, the line he himself would choose if he were in their position. Of course there is something to be said for this method. In war, as in every other conflict of two wills, it is well to keep in mind the fact that the opponent is not unlikely to take the way which one sees to be most dangerous for oneself. But it does not certainly follow that he will. The assumption that he will do the best that is possible is not always verified in fact. In the fencing school one sometimes sees a good swordsman thrown off his guard by even an inferior opponent making an irregular and irrational attack, because it is so utterly outside of his expectations.

Von der Goltz, who was described as the best of Von Moltke's pupils, and who certainly is one of the best German writers on war, erects the theory of his master almost into a self-evident axiom, when he asks:—"Are not the reasonable dispositions of the enemy the most solid foundation that we can find for our own combinations?" Foch points to the campaigns of Napoleon, and asks if we have not a reply to the methods of this great war leader, who, with all his marvellous power of judging the enemy and divining his probable course of action yet left nothing to mere supposition but always took the most ample precautions to protect his own movements and keep touch with his opponent, in order to be sure of where the enemy was and what he was doing, not merely trusting to reasoning out what he must be doing.

"Von Moltke's deductions," remarks Foch, "are always obviously logical and reasonable. Such or such must be the probable conduct of the enemy; but it is not the actual line he is taking. Here we have the

special characteristic of the 'homme du cabinet', the man who works at the desk as Chief of the German Staff. There is a constant appeal to reasoning, and then he bases his plans on the conjectures and hypotheses he has reasoned out. Unfortunately for his method, they do not always co-incide with the reality of things, which is often the improbable, something arising from causes that one cannot take hold of and explain. If he were a man of action in a higher degree, Von Moltke would have taken account more largely of the human factors with their widely varying results. He would have sought to base his plans on the actual truth, first sought for and then ascertained."

He is not trying to depreciate Von Moltke. He recognizes most fully and generously the genius and the high soldierly capacity of the man who organized victory for Germany, disaster for France in the "terrible year." But he is pointing out the weak spot in Von Moltke's leadership, in order to warn his French audience against like mistakes and to confirm his own teaching of the importance of *sûreté* as the basis of success in the conduct of war. He is insisting that action must be based on certified facts—not on even the most logically reasoned out suppositions.

The moment of supreme peril for the German arms, the great opportunity for France, if there had been a real leader in command of the Army of the Rhine, came in the middle of August. At the beginning of the month, Von Moltke's plans were based on the supposition that the French would make a stand near the frontier, on the line of the river Sarre. He planned his decisive battle on this basis. Two armies were to attack the enemy's front; the third, moving up from Alsace,

was to strike the decisive blow against his right flank, and threaten his line of retreat. It was a well-devised battle plan;—the very date was fixed for it—August 9th. But by that time, other events had intervened—the unexpected, that plays so large a part in war—and the French were in retreat. MacMahon, defeated at Woerth, was retiring beyond the Vosges, Bazaine with the main army in Lorraine was falling back towards Metz, *en route* for Verdun.

There had been fighting on Sunday, August 14th, east of Metz, the Battle of Borny, an indecisive action, the chief result of which had been to delay the French retirement. On the 15th, as the French made no attempt to renew the action but continued their retirement through Metz, and had abandoned the crossings of the Moselle above the fortress, Von Moltke began the crossing of the river with his main fighting force (the Second Army, commanded by Prince Frederick Charles), while the First Army, under Steinmetz, covered the movement by watching Metz on the right bank.

Von Moltke had now to decide on his further operations. He had very imperfect information as to the actual movements of the French army under Bazaine—five Army Corps. So, according to his system, he set to work to reason out what his opponent must inevitably do; and he felt so certain of the result of his reasoning, that he proceeded to take a risky and adventurous course of action himself.

We have in the German Staff history of the war his own record of how he formed his judgment of the situation. We are told that at the German headquarters there was a *conviction* that the French could not have any idea of accepting battle behind the Moselle and

near Metz, and it seemed equally unlikely that they would make a stand between the Moselle and the Meuse, that region being hardly favourable for an action against superior numbers.

"It was rather to be supposed," says the official narrative, "that the enemy's commander would adopt the solution which at the moment seemed to be the best —namely to withdraw the Army of the Rhine intact behind the Meuse as rapidly as possible. Once arrived there, it would have at its disposal enough routes by which to reach in safety the west of France, and effect its junction with the other military forces of the Empire. This was what must be prevented. The Army of the Rhine must not be allowed to reach the Argonne. On the contrary, it must be forced to incline to the northwards, and thus be separated from the other portions of the army, which had retired directly westward. The best means for the Second Army to counteract the plans, thus attributed to the enemy, seemed to be to seize the crossings of the Meuse as quickly as possible, and force the enemy by a march towards that river parallel to his own to continue his movement without any respite."

Von Moltke felt so certain of his conclusion, that he took immediate action upon it. Some of the reports, brought in by his advanced cavalry in the course of the day, might well have made him suspect that he had not grasped the real situation; but he was so dominated by the theory he had formed, that they were either treated as unimportant or interpreted so as to fit in with the pre-conceived idea. The cavalry work was not well done. A bold push to the northward and northeastward would have revealed, on the 15th, that the French was massed close to Metz, crowded on the roads

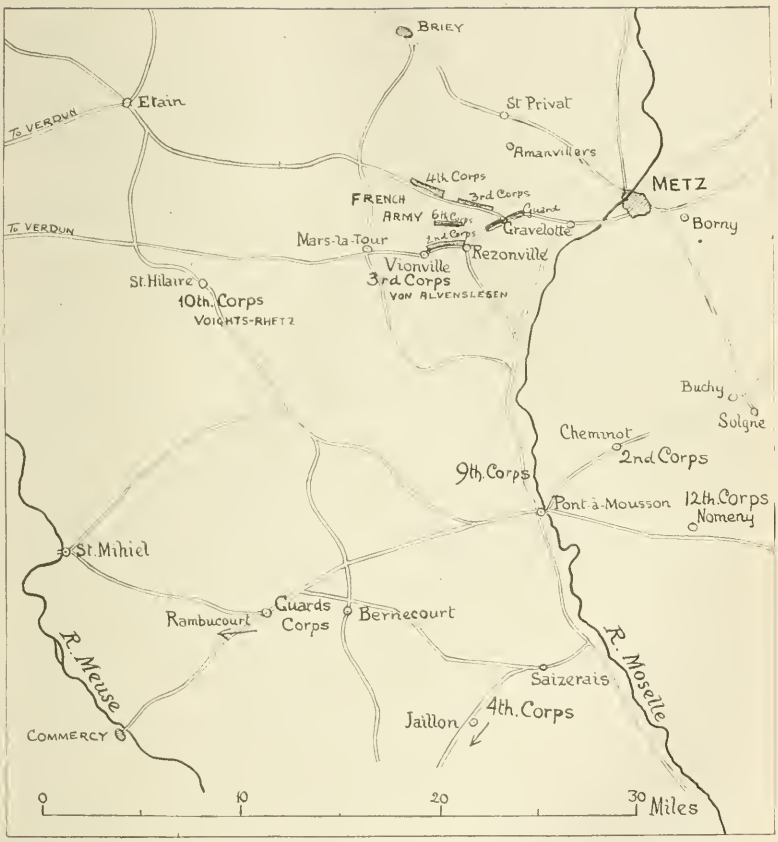
to the westwards, with the heads of its columns just reaching the slopes of the plateau on the west bank. It was moving so slowly,—that instead of trying to follow it on a parallel line of march, seize the Meuse bridges south of Verdun, and force it on to a line of retreat towards Belgium in order to separate it from the French forces about Châlons—its line of retreat could have been cut, and a battle against superior numbers forced upon it. For Frederick Charles had seven army corps at his disposal, and the five under Bazaine's command.

This battle eventually took place, and very soon; but it happened, not as the result of Von Moltke's judgment of the situation and the plans he adopted, but because the French command was hopelessly inefficient, and the subordinate German leaders—notably Prince Frederick Charles—were good soldiers, who were ready to take responsibility and act on their own initiative as the course of events revealed that the orders issued from headquarters did not fit the situation.

Meanwhile there was a dangerous crisis. Von Moltke's orders issued on August 15th, and the orders based on them by Prince Frederick Charles, directed the march of the seven army corps of the Second army in such a way, that on August 16th, there would be wide dispersion, instead of concentration, division of aims instead of unity of purpose. The army was to be used partly to push on and seize the bridges of the Meuse, partly to move on a line parallel to the assumed French movement. There was no touch with the enemy, but only occasional contact by the cavalry; there was no advanced guard to cover the whole march and hold the enemy. The Third Corps (Alvensleben) was to march to Mars-

la-Tour (about fifteen miles west of Metz on the nearest road to Verdun); the Tenth Corps (Voigts-Rhetz) would be moving about ten miles further west. The Prussian Guard and the Fourth Corps, ten miles apart and on different lines of march, would be pushing towards the crossings of the Meuse and both nearly twenty miles away from the two corps already named. Of the three other corps assigned to Prince Frederick Charles's command, the Ninth was crossing the Moselle some miles above Metz, and the Third and Twelfth were marching to the crossings of the same river. There was a widespread dispersion. All the five French corps were concentrated. There was a chance of beating the Germans in detail, if the French had had a leader who knew anything about the real situation and could rise to the opportunity it offered.

August 16th saw a hard-fought battle, variously known as the battle of Mars-la-Tour or of Gravelotte in French accounts, and known in Germany as the battle of Rezonville. Alvensleben, marching northwards with the Third Corps, came upon the flank of the whole French army. With the idea that he had no such serious force in his front, but that the French must have made considerable progress with their retreat so that he had to deal only with a detachment, he attacked. Single-handed he had to hold out for hours against overwhelming numbers. He would have been crushed, only that the French fought a purely defensive battle, made no serious attack, and thought all was won if they could "maintain their positions," while their incompetent chief, Bazaine, had a theory that the Germans wanted to cut him off from Metz, and kept some of his best troops idle all day to guard a flank that was never in



Sketch map showing the situation on Aug. 16, 1870, resulting from Von Moltke's orders based on an incorrect hypothesis as to the position of the French Army — the seven Corps of Prince Frederick Charles's Army widely dispersed & a single corps coming into collision with the concentrated French Army (five corps).

danger. Alvensleben held on doggedly, until Voigts-Rhetz, marching to the sound of the cannon, came to his help. Even then, the French had victory in their hands, if they would only attack. No further reinforcement could reach the Germans that day, thanks to the dispersion of their army. They were saved by the lack of elementary battle-leading on the French side.

Once more we have the lack of *sûreté* bringing disaster menacingly near.

Next day, the French disappeared from the positions they had held during the hard-fought battle. No touch was kept with them. The German Corps, that had fought on the 16th, were exhausted by their efforts. There were no fresh troops on the ground. Moltke, warned by the battle that he had failed to grasp the facts of the situation was hastily concentrating his far-scattered army corps. But once more he was building up a scheme based on what it was most reasonable to suppose the French would do. It so happened that Bazaine just then was acting most unreasonably. Like a timid amateur yachtsman, who on a rough day feels that he is only safe if he keeps a port under his lee, Bazaine was haunted by the idea that the salvation of his army depended on keeping in touch with the fortress of Metz, and that the Germans must be anxious to cut him off from it—to drive him away from it. They had no such idea. At the German headquarters, Von Moltke had decided that the French must be marching away to the north-westwards. His next manœuvre, based on this assumption, resulted in orders for a march in that direction, partly following up the French, partly trying to get on their flank and head them off. Then it was discovered that Bazaine, instead of breaking away

to the north-west, had fallen back on the heights west of Metz. Partly by the headquarters, partly by the action of the subordinate commanders, the mistakes made were rectified and the victory of Gravelotte-St. Privat was won. But even in its winning there were delays, local failures and needless losses, on account of defective reconnaissance and consequent errors in battle-leading. Thus, to take the most notable instance, the German headquarters placed the right of the French line some miles south of the position which it really occupied, and as the decisive attack was planned to be directed against this flank, what was to have been a flank attack became frontal, and the whole arrangement had to be modified. Once more the German leadership gave the French opportunities of which they took no advantage.

Operations, here only briefly outlined, are fully detailed by Foch, maps and documents in hand. Day after day we follow the debates of the staff, the framing of orders and their execution. At each step, he draws practical lessons from the story, not only on his main theme, but on many other topics of military interest. He works out from time to time a scheme of what might have been done. He contracts the Napoleonic method of action under the protection of an advanced guard, with the defective method of incomplete protection and information, supplemented by reasoned out suppositions as to what *must be,* though this again and again proves to be the thing that *is not.* The great lesson is the necessity of action based on ascertained facts, the value of *sûreté.*

At the same time, no praise is spared for the good points in German war organization, strategy and battle

tactics. There is no tendency to underrate the enemy. The very last words of the book are a tribute of praise to King William of Prussia, afterwards the first Kaiser of the new Empire.* In another remarkable passage, he sets forth the services of German students to the development of the science of strategy. But he notes that they were the pupils of Napoleon. They learned from him in the day of their defeats; they applied the knowledge in the uprising which Germany remembers as the "War of Liberation". Foch wishes his own countrymen to read the lessons of 1870; but he does not make even the greatest of German leaders a model to be imitated; he points out how far his leadership falls short of the genius of Napoleon. If he criticises Von Moltke, he is equally frank in his exposure of the weaknesses and blunders of the French generals who opposed him. He is dealing with these records of 1870 in order to make it unlikely that such disasters should again be incurred by the leaders of France in war. In the preface to his book he takes as its motto "In memoriam, in spem"—"In memory of the past, in order to build up the hope of victory in the future."

His work, *De la Conduite de la Guerre,* is a practical application of the principles laid down in his first book —their application to the criticism of a great campaign. He makes them still clearer, and enforces and enlarges upon their practical lessons. But besides this scientific

* "As for the King, brought up in the hard school of the Wars of Independence, he regards victory only as a recompense to be gained by the devotion of all to the common cause. Far from seeking to incarnate the State in himself, he makes himself the first of its servants. Often he abandons his own views and resigns the most precious prerogatives of his royal power into the hands of capable counsellors. As the price of his self-abnegation he brings back from the campaign of France the Imperial crown of Germany, and will perhaps receive from history the title of the Great."—*De la Conduite de la Guerre,* pp. 483, 484.

teaching, the book conveys another lesson—the truth that in the darkest hour success is still possible to the vigilant leader who is ready to seize the opportunities offered by his opponent. One feels, as one reads it, that success in war depends, not on mere numbers, not on the merely material conditions but on the military spirit, the disciplined knowledge, the strong-willed enterprise of the chiefs who command.

So we come back to Napoleon's saying, that in war the moral is to the material as three to one, and to Foch's doctrine of the supremacy of the moral factor. As to the leading principles, his whole theory of the conduct of war depends upon two vital points. First, there is the principle of *sûreté* in its twofold sense of security from the interference of the enemy, preserving thus "freedom of action,"—and sureness, the result of due steps being taken to ascertain the facts, to grasp the real situation, to base one's plans and orders not on mere suppositions but on realities. Secondly, there is the principle of the economy of force, the grouping of every available man and gun for the decisive effort: the rigid economy of detachments, so as not to fritter away the force to be used at the decisive point. On this is built the whole theory of securing victory by being the stronger at this vital point. It applies both in the strategy of the campaign and in the tactics of the battle-field.

Neither principle is new. But Foch gives a new development to these old doctrines. He takes care that they shall not be obscured by side issues or minor details. He views everything in their light, and shows how they can be made in every operation the safe guide of conduct and command. And he enforces his teaching with

characteristic phrases, and comparisons that reveal his own energetic spirit.

The later editions of both his books have been only reprints of their first issue. After the Japanese war with Russia, in the preface to a new edition of his work, *De la Conduite de la Guerre,* he made some remarks on the strategy of the war, showing how the conduct of the Japanese operations presented new illustrations of the principles he had laid down. In referring to the prolonged battle of Mukden, he notes the evolution of the vast battlefields of modern war, their characteristics, the entrenched front, and the strategic direction of the decisive attack. In the great battles in Manchuria, "the attack is constantly accompained by a manœuvre strategically aiming at the opponent's line of communications, and tactically directed against one wing of the enemy, to destroy it or to reach the line of communications. At Mukden, Nogi's army seeks, not so much to crush the Russian right by a flank attack, as to reach its rear, in order thus to compel the retirement of all the enemy's forces. Thus the *manœuvre battle* of the Napoleonic epoch and of 1870 is transformed into the *operation battle* lasting several days, the decision on the battlefield becomes a strategic fact, and the union becomes closer between strategy and tactics.

Both sides are entrenched in these Manchurian battles. Under the influence of this double necessity of a prolonged frontal engagement and wide-sweeping flank attack, the assailant has to go beyond the limits so far recognized as needful. To strengthen these extended lines, he has to use all the resources of armament and field-fortification. Only telegraphy makes possible the command of such vast fronts.

But though the details of their application change, the principles of the art of war remain the same. We have here, outlined, some characteristics not only of the Manchurian battles, but of the still vaster conflicts on the battlefields of the coming Great War. There too Foch was to illustrate once more the unchanging character of the dominant principles of war, amid the changes of armament and mechanism, introduced by the progress of industrial science and invention.

Foch's teaching has been thus dealt with, because, without a survey of it and some grasp of its general purport and method, one cannot understand either the great soldier's services to France or the full import of his exploits in the war, in which he was to take so pre-eminent a part.

We now return to the record of his career after the close of his directorship of the École de Guerre.

CHAPTER VII

THE COMING OF THE GREAT WAR

1911 was a critical year. There was a long period of tension in the summer, caused by the Agadir crisis in Morocco. War with Germany seemed not unlikely. England and France had become good friends, linked together not yet by an alliance but by a "friendly understanding," the *Entente Cordiale*. In both countries the preliminary steps were taken for a possible mobilization in case they might have to stand together against Germany.

Foch had left the École de Guerre at the close of the annual course, in the early summer. He was then promoted to the rank of General of Division, and given the command of the 13th Division of the Seventh Army Corps, with headquarters at Chaumont on the upper Marne. The Seventh was one of the corps in the second line from the eastern frontier, and he found himself busy with preparations for rapidly placing his division on a war footing if need be. But the tension over Morocco diminished, an agreement was arrived at, and Europe settled down again to a hopeful mood as to preservation of peace.

The crisis had drawn England and France more closely together. There was as yet no alliance, no definite pledge obliging Britain to take up arms in defence of France and accept a challenge to her as a challenge to herself. But events were shaping towards

the future alliance. The French fleet had been permanently concentrated in the Mediterranean, and England had undertaken that in the event of an unprovoked attack on France the British fleet would if necessary intervene to prevent hostile action of the German navy against the northern Atlantic French coasts. Further, British and French staff officers met and exchanged views as to the form British military co-operation was to take should joint action on land become necessary.

As a further step towards securing useful co-operation should the course of events compel the two armies to stand together, British officers of rank attended the great manœuvres of the French army, and, in the autumn of 1912, a *mission militaire,* a group of French officers, was sent to watch the British army manœuvres in East Anglia.

General Foch was selected to be the chief of this "military mission," and he and his staff were the guests of the British Government during the manœuvres near Cambridge—the first British manœuvres, by the way, in which aircraft took a part. Foch does not speak English. German he knows well, for the study of the language became popular among the more studious French officers after the war of 1870-71, and it was the foreign language usually taken in the higher military examinations. Foch's writings show an intimate knowledge of recent German military literature—not merely of those books that have been translated into French. In East Anglia, his lack of English was compensated by the fact that a good many British officers have a working knowledge of French. He made many friends among them—friendships that were to be useful a couple of years later.

As to his impressions of the British army, of course nothing was published of the official report he made to his Government; but in more than one conversation with Sir John French and his staff, he expressed his admiration of the men, their physique, their bearing, their endurance and steadiness, and their endless cheerfulness. Certain it is that those East Anglian days led him to abandon the idea expressed at the time when England and France were still divided by thorny questions of African policy and when dangerous incidents on the Nile and the Niger had brought the two countries perilously near a rupture—the opinion that the English "*mercenaires*" were hardly fit for Continental warfare. * When he expressed this opinion in his lectures at the École de Guerre, it was an echo of views very widely held in France at the time, and even more strongly expressed by other French writers of recognized authority. The use of the word "mercenaries" meant, however, nothing more than that the British army was not levied under a law of universal liability to military service, but depended on recruits enlisted in competition with the labour market. Few Frenchmen realized that, though the British soldier received better pay than that of a Continental conscript, recruits were not attracted by wages lower than that of any other occupation, but by the adventurous fighting spirit, and it was really a volunteer army. In all Continental countries there was the fixed belief that the true national spirit of an army depended upon its being raised by a law of obligatory service and realizing the ideal of "the nation

* "Il est douteux qu'on voie réussir une armée de mercénaires ou de soldats âgés, comme l'armée anglaise, qui fait forcément appel à la solidité et à la discipline du rang pour suppléer aux qualités morales de l'homme et à l'initiative individuelle."—*Principes de la Guerre*, p. 39.

in arms." It was further difficult for a Continental soldier to understand the special conditions that underlay the organization of the British army and the dominant fact that it was primarily intended to do what no other nation even attempted, namely to keep year after year a force of some 75,000 men practically on a war footing in a tropical country thousands of miles away, and secondly an expeditionary force ready for mobilization, to act essentially as the landing force of an all-powerful navy. The large reserve supplied by the Territorial army was left out of account. A section of the British press—opposed to the Haldane reforms, and carrying on a campaign for conscription—had helped to spread abroad the idea that the regular army was hopelessly weak and the Territorial force worthless. Then there was a tendency—especially in France—to set very little value on the war experience that British officers had obtained in fairly easy victories over semi-civilized enemies in the border wars of the Empire. It used to be said that such experiences were no training for European war, and that the French army of 1870 owed some of its defects to habits acquired in Algerian warfare.

That such ideas prevailed abroad made it especially important that a soldier like Foch should have the opportunity of obtaining personal experience of the British army and its methods. His visit to East Anglia was therefore a very important event in his preparation for his future task.

Towards the end of the year—on December 17th, 1912,—Foch received further promotion, leaving his divisional command at Chaumont to take command of the Eighth Army Corps at Bourges. In the following

summer—on August 23rd, 1913—he was transferred to perhaps the most important corps command in France—that of the Twentieth Army Corps, with headquarters at Nancy.

Foch had last been at Nancy as a young student from the College of St. Clément, spending a few days there to pass an examination. The Germans held the city, and Manteuffel had his headquarters at the old Palais du Gouvernement with sentries in spiked helmets at the doors. That was forty-two years before the summer day when General Foch made his entry into the capital of Lorraine to take up his residence in the same palace as Commander-in-Chief of the Twentieth Corps. Nancy was *en fête,* with the tricolour flying from roofs and windows, and the evening ended with bands of the six regiments of the garrison parading the street and square to the music of the Sambre and Meuse March, by the light of hundreds of torches.

The Nancy Army Corps was then regarded as the crack corps of the French army. It was regularly kept above the ordinary peace strength and almost on a war footing, for it held the sharply advanced salient of the French frontier towards Metz and Germany. It formed a most important part of the "covering force" under the protection of which the whole French army would be mobilized in the event of war.

Foch and the Twentieth Corps were therefore on the outpost line. More than once in his lectures at the École de Guerre he had referred to Nancy as the point of the eastern frontier most exposed to a German invasion. "Château Salins is only twenty-seven kilometres from Nancy" is a phrase that he repeats,* pointing to the

* *Principes de la Guerre,* p. 43.—*Conduite de la Guerre,* p. 49.

nearest place of importance beyond the German frontier—Château Salins, French before 1871, but then the German frontier town of "Salzburg."

But the frontier was actually nearer to Nancy, for it ran well to the west of Château Salins and at the nearest point was only sixteen kilometres, or about ten miles from Foch's headquarters at Nancy. A declaration of war might bring a raid on the city even before the enemy's mobilization was complete, for the border held by the German "covering troops" was not four hours' march from Nancy. The city lies in a hollow among the vine-clad hills where the Meurthe flows between the heights of the Grand Couronné and the forest plateau of Haye. When after the Franco-German War and the loss of Metz and Strasburg, General Séré de Rivières was reorganizing the eastern defences of France there was for awhile some idea of crowning these hills with a circle of forts. But rightly or wrongly it was decided that to fortify Nancy would be to create a somewhat isolated advanced post in front of the eastern fortress screen formed by the four entrenched camps of Verdun, Toul, Épinal and Belfort, and the lines of forts along the heights of the Meuse and the upper Moselle.

Military opinion was divided as to what would be the fate of Nancy. There were many high authorities who held that it might have to be abandoned at the outset of a war, in order to concentrate the defence on the line of the fortress barrier from Verdun to Belfort. But Foch, with his ideas of the offensive as the only possible way to success in war, was not the man to accept such a view and to consent to the sacrifice of the great city of some hundred thousand inhabitants in the

first days of a conflict with Germany. Nancy had surrendered to a squadron of uhlans in 1870, after the defeats of Wissemburg and Woerth. There would be no surrender next time. It would have a bad moral effect, if in a new war the Germans could announce in the opening days of the campaign the occupation of the historic city as a first prize won on French territory. So, from the day of his arrival, the new commander of the Twentieth Corps studied the defence of Nancy and the possibilities of a march on Château Salins, with what the opening moves of the Great War were to show before many months were over.

In the summer of 1914, Foch arranged and directed the first manœuvres of his army corps, division against division in a week of mimic warfare that ended on July 5th. It was a useful rehearsal for the reality. Some of the blank-cartridge fighting took place on the very ground that in a few weeks was to echo to the roar of shotted guns and the reports of exploding shells. He had with him during these manœuvres a soldier of his own type, General de Curières de Castelnau, a member of the Conseil supérieur de Guerre, who was making a tour of inspection in eastern France and took this opportunity of seeing the Twentieth Corps at work under its new chief. De Castelnau was of the same age as Foch. (He was born on Christmas Day, 1851.) He came from the same mountain land of Gascony, and like Foch was a keen soldier of exceptional ability and a deeply religious man. He had served in the Army of the Loire during the Franco-German War, and had been a captain at the age of nineteen. The two generals were soon to be comrades in the great events that were so near at hand.

On the eve of the manœuvres there had come disquieting news—the telegram that told of the murder of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife at Serajevo on Sunday, June 28th. But after the first shock of horror produced by the tidings, there was a general acceptance of the optimist view, that even if war resulted between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, it would be "localized" by the efforts of European diplomacy, as had been the case with so many recent wars in the troubled Balkan region.

For nearly three weeks there was no really serious alarm as to the general maintenance of peace. We have clear proof of the fact that in military circles in France the outlook was regarded as favourable for on July 18th, we find Foch leaving Nancy for a fortnight's leave and a holiday at his home, the old manor-house of Trefeunteuniou in Brittany. His son remained with his regiment, but his two daughters and their children came to Brittany at the same time, with his sons-in-law, their husbands, Captain Fournier of the General Staff and Captain Bécourt of the Twenty-sixth Chasseurs, whose post was on the frontier at Pont-à-Mousson. Leave would certainly not have been asked for by the three officers, and above all by Foch, if there was any idea that war on the eastern frontier was close at hand.

The family party had hardly gathered at Trefeunteuniou, when the international horizon began suddenly to darken. July 23rd brought the first note from Vienna to the Serbian Government, followed swiftly by the announcement that Russia would stand by her "little Slav brother." The danger of a European war was evident. If Russia moved, Germany would stand by Austria, and France would be involved as Russia's ally.

The party at the manor-house broke up, and Foch hurried back to Nancy.

On July 28th, Austria-Hungary declared war against Serbia, and the bombardment of Belgrade began next day. The same afternoon the Czar issued his orders for a general mobilization. On August 1st Germany and Russia were at war, and the order for the mobilization of the French army was published. All was ready at Nancy. By that evening Foch had his army corps, not indeed completely mobilized, but ready for instant action, with an outpost line watching the border.

The Twentieth Army Corps was made up of the 11th Division (headquarters, Nancy), and the 39th Division (headquarters, Toul). There was a healthy rivalry between the two divisions. The 11th had been called the *Division de fer* (the "iron division"). The 39th promised that they would prove themselves to be the *Division d'acier* (the "steel division"). Both were already near war strength. Elsewhere in France there were difficulties and delays in the mobilization. Reserve stores of arms and equipment had been neglected by the politicians for the sake of dangerous economies, and at the outset tens of thousands of men had to be turned away from the depôts when they presented themselves for embodiment. But at Nancy all worked swiftly and smoothly. There was even a surplus of reservists armed and equipped and turned over to a new corps known for awhile as the "2nd Reserve Group of Divisions." But the plan adopted by Joffre, the chief of the General Staff and now Commander-in-Chief of the French armies, was to take the offensive at the earliest possible moment.

Several armies were being formed by grouping

together the army corps as they completed their mobilization. Meanwhile the Twentieth Corps was guarding the frontier. It was to form part of the Second Army, otherwise known as the Army of Lorraine. This group was to be made up as follows:—

Army Corps	*Peace Headquarters*	*Commander*
Fifteenth Corps	Marseilles	General Espinasse.
Sixteenth "	Montpellier	General Taverna.
Twentieth "	Nancy	General Foch.
2nd Group of Reserve Divisions.		

These four corps would give a total fighting force of about 140,000 men, with some 400 guns. The Commander-in-Chief of the Army thus organized with headquarters at Nancy was Foch's friend, General de Castelnau. On its right in the Vosges was the First Army under General Dubail—(Eighth, Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Twenty-first Corps with General Conneau's Cavalry Division). On its left, based on Verdun, was the Third Army under Foch's old comrade of the Polytechnique, General Ruffey.

The mobilization and concentration was complete by the beginning of August. The end of that week saw the first great clash of the armies along the whole front from Mons to the Vosges.

CHAPTER VIII

FOCH'S FORECAST OF THE WAR

In Foch's second book, *De la Conduite de la Guerre,* published ten years before the Great War, there is an interesting forecast of the probable course of events in a war between France and Germany. The General has left it unaltered in the latest edition of the book, published in 1915, although events did not fulfil his anticipations. We may take it that he allowed it to stand unaltered and without note or comment, because it expresses the view that, quite apart from moral and legal considerations, Germany judged from the purely military standpoint made a mistake in including in her plan of campaign in 1914 the march through Belgium and the violation of Belgian neutrality.

He discusses the question in connection with his study of the first phase of the campaign of 1870.* He examines Von Moltke's plans for the war, as set forth in a memorandum prepared for King William of Prussia in the winter of 1868-69 and the instructions issued to the General Staff at Berlin in the spring of 1870.

Von Moltke adopted as the basis of his plan the ideas put forward by Clausewitz nearly forty years earlier. When there was danger of war between France and Prussia, in 1830, Clausewitz prepared a memoir of the plan of campaign to be adopted in the event of hostilities. It was an official document drawn up at the request of

* *Conduite de la Guerre,* chapter iii, p. 25.

Von Krauseneck, then Chief of the Prussian General Staff. Clausewitz laid it down that the Prussian army should act on the offensive, and that the objects to be kept in view should be (1) to defeat the French army in one or more battles: (2) to take Paris; (3) to force what was left of the beaten army across the Loire. Contact with the main French army would be assured by a march across the frontier, directed on Paris.

Von Moltke embodied this general outline in his plan of 1868-69. He calculated that on mobilization the German armies would have the advantage of superior numbers. The army would concentrate in the Bavarian Palatinate for the invasion of France. No large force would be detached to guard the upper Rhine facing towards Strasburg and Alsace. Such a detachment would uselessly weaken the main striking force. Concentrated in the Palatinate facing towards Metz, this main army would directly cover the middle Rhine region and indirectly protect south Germany. The menace to Lorraine would protect south Germany.

If the French attempted a disembarkation on the North German Coast, they would only increase their inferiority in the main theatre of operations. If they violated either Swiss or Belgian neutrality, they would encounter serious opposition from local troops, and a march through Belgium would give them a long line of operations on which once more the army in the Palatinate would be well placed for delivering a deadly blow.

Foch describes the whole plan as a masterly one, clear and simple and based upon the most secure principles of war. Its basis was the idea of the offensive with all available forces concentrated in one central region. Foch believed that in future war the German Staff

would recognize that the same reasons still held good. There would not be two German offensives, one in Alsace, the other starting from the lower Rhine.

But might not the enemy be attracted by the idea of an advance from the lower Rhine through Belgium, avoiding or turning the eastern defence barrier of France, the line of entrenched camps and forts extending from Belfort to Verdun? Foch did not think so. He pointed out that the object of the German Staff must be to concentrate the largest possible force in the shortest time. That would require the use of a highly developed railway system with plenty of long detraining platforms. The place was marked on the maps of the German railways. It would be the Alsace-Lorraine front. But there were further reasons. Besides encountering opposition on the way, the Germans would have to weaken their striking force by detachments left at Brussels and before Antwerp. And they would be exposed to a flank attack by the French army, provided that its chiefs held firmly to the three principles:—

(1) the concentration of its forces in a single mass, without detachments; (2) concentration of this mass in a region well provided with railways and detraining platforms; (3) concentration in depth, so that at need the blow might be delivered north, east or south.

In a remarkable passage * he further discusses the question of the region to be chosen for the French concentration of this "mass of manœuvre" or main striking force. It must be where the railway system not only favoured rapidity of concentration but also would be thoroughly well adapted for the supply service of the army as the operations developed "either in an of-

* *Conduite de la Guerre*, pp. 36-37.

fensive or in a retreat following a check." Such a retreat would have to be in the direction of the most important part of the national territory, and the zone of concentration should therefore be in advance of and covering it. The actual centre of concentration is not precisely indicated, beyond stating that "it ought to be a point on the line, Château Salins, Clermont Ferrand. Questions of time will enter into the selection of the precise point."

When we turn to the map, we find that this is a line from the German frontier in front of Nancy, running southeastwards into the heart of France—a line passing through the Trouée de Charmes (the gap in the fortress barrier between Toul and Épinal) and over the plateau of Langres. We have here an instance of the way in which the thought of Nancy and Château Salins recurred to him in the days of his professorship as the critical point in the eastern frontier zone. The mention of Clermont Ferrand seems to carry the region of possible concentration strangely far back into the interior of the country. But it seems fairly evident that this point is named only to indicate the general direction of the depth of concentration already insisted upon. Foch is suggesting the concentration along a railway system for a huge army that may have to be used in one of three different directions—there may be a victorious advance across the frontier directed on Mayence the nodal point of the Rhine front: or there may be a move to the right through Alsace against the upper Rhine: or to the left, to strike against the flank of an invasion across the upper Meuse. In any case, it must be the crushing impact of one concentrated force at the moment of decisive contact.

From what follows it is clear that he expects the centre of concentration to be much nearer Château Salins than Clermont Ferrand. For he adds that it must cover the frontier provinces. Public opinion has now too much influence on a government for it to be possible to leave them undefended. And besides, the resources of the occupied district would be a gain to the enemy if he were allowed to take possession of it.

Foch goes on to point out that protection does not necessarily mean occupation in force. The protection of the frontier districts must however be arranged so as to accord with "the absolute concurrence of all forces in the decisive operations." The required protection may be given indirectly—as Moltke protected south Germany in 1870—and directly by the *troupes de couverture,* the frontier guard nowadays kept on foot by every Continental army even in peace time, and by the *troupes de sûreté* or advanced guard of the main army. He foresees minor operations by these troops before the operations on a large scale begin.

But he has little doubt—as is shown by another passage *—that in case of war with Germany the first serious advance of the enemy would be against the eastern fortress line. He argues that the equipment of the German armies with batteries of heavy howitzers firing high explosive shells points to preparation for dealing at the very outset with the forts of the entrenched camps and the barrier line. Ten years before the war, he had in his mind as the most likely opening for such a conflict, not a German invasion of Belgium, but an attempt to smash a way through the eastern fortress barrier with the help of the shattering fire of

* *Conduite de la Guerre,* pp. 44-48.

high explosives, in case that the enemy mobilized and concentrated quickly enough to get in the first blow. The French army would have its vanguard, the *troupes de couverture* and *troupes de sûreté* beyond the fortress line at the outset, and its main mass ready either to strike at the German advance while endeavouring to force its way through, or to deal with a break through on the right or left. But he makes no attempt to forecast in detail any scheme of operations. As he more than once insists there can be no forecast of a war beyond the concentration and the first move.

It is remarkable that although German military literature, the discussions in the Belgian press and other indications, pointed so strongly to an invasion of Belgium forming part of the German plan in case of war, Foch put it aside as highly improbable. He never says it is impossible; but he decides against it on the ground that the invader would be adopting a less practical plan than that of a direct attack through French territory. The neglect of the northern defences of France, the policy under which Lille became an open town instead of a huge entrenched camp, suggests that the French Staff shared this view. But the possibility of the violation of Belgian neutrality was provided for in an alternative scheme, besides the first plan of concentration for the French armies which contemplated an offensive at an early date in Alsace-Lorraine.

Heavily outnumbered, and with unexpected difficulties in the mobilization, General Joffre adopted in August, 1914, plans very different from Foch's ideal of the great "mass of manœuvre" concentrated in one region. But the plan of Foch might perhaps have been adapted to the emergency with good results. As it was, the French

armies were strung out on a long line from Belfort on the Swiss frontier to beyond Maubeuge on the Flemish border. But by a strange turn of events, Foch found himself in the army that faced the German frontier at the very point on which his thoughts had so often been fixed in the days of peace, and his first march into hostile territory was from Nancy by way of Château Salins.

To make quite clear the bearing on the general course of events of the operations in which he was now to take part, we must briefly summarize the opening moves of the Great War. The strict censorship of the press, enforced in the allied countries in the first weeks of the conflict, necessarily veiled all that was passing in a cloud of mystery. Nothing better than fragmentary scraps of disconnected information reached the public, and the events in front of Nancy were mentioned only in brief and unsatisfactory official communiqués to which little attention was paid in England, because they were hardly issued when public attention was rivetted on the fighting about Mons and Charleroi, the retreat from the Belgian frontier and the successful stand on the Marne.

It was not until 1917 that anything like an intelligible account of the fighting on the Lorraine frontier in August, 1914, was allowed to be published in France. The result has been that the importance of these events has been underrated and misunderstood. Indeed, comparatively few people in England or in the United States have ever heard of the first great battle of the war—the fighting on a front of some forty miles, which is known in France as the battle of Morhange, in Germany as the battle of Metz—or of the battle which followed on

the French fortress line, an engagement of several days' duration, known in France as the battle of the Trouée de Charmes.

Years hence, when the various belligerent nations have published their staff histories of the war, the documents and orders in which their plans of campaign were embodied will be available. Meanwhile we can only judge what the German plan in the west was, from the opening events of the campaign. The mobilization in Germany had worked smoothly and had been very rapid; but the first blow was struck by frontier troops, normally almost on a war footing even in peace time, and set in movement while the mobilization was still in progress. The immediate doubling of the available units, by the formation of reserve corps made a main striking force available that was much stronger than the Allies had anticipated—or at least had expected to take the field at the outset. By the evening of the fourth day, the German guns were shattering the forts of Liège. In the third week the Germans were in Brussels, the Belgian army was retiring on Antwerp, and Namur was besieged.

Two armies—those of Von Kluck and Von Bülow—had pushed into Belgium west of the Meuse. These formed the right of the German strategic deployment. They now wheeled southward towards the French frontier, Von Kluck on the extreme right flinging a large force of cavalry and armed motor-cars out towards the Belgian coast and towards Lille, and directing his main advance on the Maubeuge region. Von Bülow marched on Charleroi and the crossings of the Sambre. In English speaking lands, from the fact that the British army was on this flank of the long French line, public atten-

tion was rivetted on western Belgium, and the movement of the German right was regarded as the main advance of the enemy. But his chief striking force was concentrated east of the Meuse, in the wooded country of the Ardennes and in Luxemburg. Here there were no less than three great armies; and the fact that one of them was commanded by the German Crown Prince was a sufficient indication that they were intended to play a chief part in the invasion of France. These formed the enemy's centre. His left, like his right, was made up of two armies—that of Prince Rupert of Bavaria in German Lorraine with headquarters at Metz, and that of General Von Heeringen in Alsace with headquarters at Strasburg. At the outset they were acting on the defensive, covering Germany against a possible French enterprise towards the Rhine. It is believed that the original French plan of operations aimed at the immediate conquest of the lost provinces by an advance into Alsace, followed by a march into German Lorraine and the Palatinate, which would be supported by the army of Alsace moving north with its right on the Rhine and its left on the Vosges after it had masked Strasburg.

The French armies on this side were a force under General Pau based on Belfort, the First Army under General Dubail and the Second Army under General De Castelnau. Pau had made a premature raid on Mulhouse on August 7th—one of those "minor enterprises before the great operations" which Foch had predicted. The French had to retire before superior numbers; but by the middle of the month they had seized the passes of the Vosges and pushed a strong detachment towards Mulhouse. The Germans under Von

Heeringen stood on the defensive. They were holding the outlets of the passes into the plain between the hills and the Rhine. Rupert of Bavaria showed no sign of activity in Lorraine. Further north, the German Crown Prince was besieging Longwy. The invasion of Belgium pointed to the enemy's main advance being against the northern frontier of France.

In the third week of August, General Joffre felt himself ready for serious operations on a large scale, and decided to meet the German menace of invasion by a counter-stroke. But it was not designed on the lines that Foch had been advocating for so many years. There was no concentration of a "mass of manœuvre" in a single region covered by an advanced guard. The numbers and fighting efficiency of the enemy were sadly underrated, and Joffre attempted an advance at several points—a linear offensive—instead of a heavy blow at one point with every man, horse and gun, that could be brought into action.

There was to be a move of two armies, the British Expeditionary Force under Sir John French, and the Fifth French Army under General Lanrezac, across the Belgian frontier by Mons and Charleroi. They were to drive back Von Kluck and Von Bülow, join hands with the Belgian army issuing from Antwerp, and then wheeling eastward recover Brussels. The Fourth Army under De Langle de Cary was to march into the Ardennes and join with Lanrezac in raising the siege of Namur. The Third Army under De Ruffey was to push towards the Ardennes, the Luxemburg border, raising the siege of Longwy. The move through the Ardennes and on Luxemburg would be a threat to the German line of communications.

To assist in this general move against the northern enemy by a menace to German territory, De Castelnau, with the Second Army supported on the right by Dubail with the First Army, was to invade German Lorraine; the general direction of the movement was to be east of Metz, towards Saarbruck, so as to act as an additional threat against the German communications.

It was a plan that, against superior forces and with the main German striking force massed in the centre, had only the remotest chance of success. Let us now follow the fortunes of De Castelnau's army, of which Foch's splendid Twentieth Corps formed the best fighting unit.

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE OF MORHANGE

In the general offensive against the enemy, De Castelnau's army was the first to move, and Foch commanded its vanguard, the Nancy Corps.

Composed largely of the men of Lorraine and about to march to the long hoped for liberation of that part of their province which had for more than forty years been annexed to Germany, it is no wonder that the officers and soldiers of the Twentieth Corps were full of enthusiasm. As a frontier corps they had been kept almost on a war footing so that there were few reservists in their ranks; and as the conscripts did not come in till September, there were no new recruits among them. The youngest of them had had nearly a year of hard training. Most of them had two or three years' service. They had just had the useful experience of the divisional manœuvres. The ranks were filled with thoroughly fit men, ranging in age from twenty to twenty-three. It was an ideal fighting force; and it had Foch in command.

On the left, about Nomeny, and holding the new entrenchments of the Grand Couronné was the Corps of Reservists (2nd Group of Reserve Divisions); on the right, towards Lunéville, Espinasse's Fifteenth Corps and Taverna's Sixteenth Corps, men of Provence and Languedoc, with all the fire of the South but not so reliable in a difficult moment as the men of Lorraine.

Beyond the right of De Castelnau's concentration, Dubail's army held the heights of the Vosges towering up to the pineclad mass of the Donon summit above the Saales Pass.

For defence, the position in which the Second Army had concentrated was admirable. The Vosges made a strong support for the right, the Grand Couronné for the left. Behind the line were the fortresses of Toul and Épinal, with between them the gap of the Charmes leading to the hill country of the Faucilles.

But what of the offensive? The German frontier was only a few miles away. On the left front, below the slopes of the Grand Couronné, it was marked by the windings of the little river Seille. Beyond the border line was a hilly country with a region of lakes between Château Salins and Saarburg, lakes which are the sources of the Seille running towards the Moselle at Metz, and of the Saar flowing northward towards Sarreguemines and Saarbruck. Beyond the lake region is the main railway line from Metz to Strasburg. At Saarburg there is an important junction where the railway from France through Lunéville joins the German system. Roughly parallel to this line runs the Marne and Rhine Canal. South of the canal and railway, the ground rises rapidly to the heights of the Vosges about the Donon.

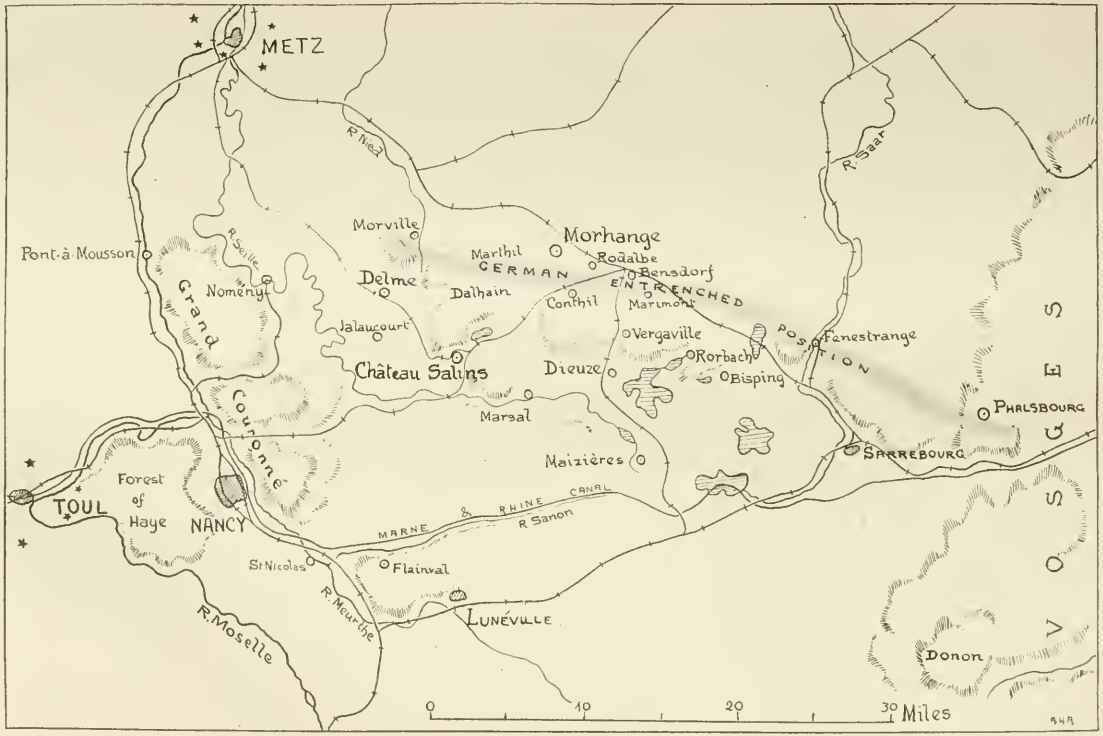
The first objective of the French advance would be the Metz-Strasburg railway. The seizure of the junction at Saarburg would cut the direct communication between the armies of Prince Rupert and Von Heeringen. Of these the latter was engaged in defending Alsace against Pau and Dubail. The probability was that the first fight would be against Rupert's army based

on the fortress of Metz. This made the left of the advance the probable point of first contact with serious opposition, so Foch was placed there with his Lorrainers.

Little was known of the defensive preparations of the enemy. The wooded character of the hilly country beyond the border made aerial observation difficult, and not much could be learned until the outposts on the frontier were driven in and some progress was made on German (once French) ground. The enemy's force on the actual frontier line was a mere screen of troops; and it was evident that he would not attempt a serious stand until the French advance had made some progress.

So the first days of the campaign were marked by easy successes. The Reserve Divisions on the left stood fast, forming a flank guard on the frontier about Nomeny and looking out towards Metz, a little more than ten miles away. Even with this protection, it was a daring manœuvre to advance thus with a great entrenched camp so near at hand, which might easily be made the starting point for a stroke against the left flank and rear of the Second Army. But the Grand Couronné was being rapidly converted into a strongly fortified position which would help to secure the exposed flank.

Foch left Nancy on August 15th. Next day he was with the advanced guard of his corps, as it marched across the frontier in two columns, the left on Delme, the right on Château Salins. There was no serious fighting. There were some skirmishes with the German outposts of the frontier guard as they fell back before the tide of invasion. There was a joyful moment as the border line was passed, and the pioneers threw down the red-white-and-black posts that marked the frontier, and the men of Nancy singing the "Marseillaise" trod the



THE BATTLE OF MORHANGE, AUGUST 19-20, 1914.

ground of German Lorraine. Bridges had been thrown across the Seille, the enemy making no attempt to hold the crossings which were commanded by the heavy artillery placed on the heights of the Couronné. That evening Foch's corps was concentrated on the German side of the little river. Further to the right, the men of Provence were moving towards the lake region, and the Languedoc corps towards Saarburg, with General Conneau's cavalry division guarding its right flank and exploring the hilly country towards its front. On the extreme right a division of Dubail's army (16th Division, Eighth Corps) was co-operating in the move on Saarburg.

A bulletin of General Joffre, published in Paris by the War Office on Tuesday, August 18th, reported further progress on the Monday. "During the whole of yesterday, the 17th," it said, "we continued to make further progress in Upper Alsace. * The enemy retired in disorder, abandoning everywhere wounded and matériel. To the south of Strasburg, where the enemy had prepared a strong position, the Germans retreated precipitately in the afternoon. Our cavalry is now in pursuit. We have moreover occupied the whole of the region of the lakes up to the west of Fenestrange. Our troops are debouching from the Seille, where the passages over the river have been abandoned by the enemy. Our cavalry is at Château Salins."

It was the first news of the Lorraine offensive, and seemed a presage of victory. But in such a movement the first operations were only the prelude of more serious engagements. Naturally, the official bulletins would make the most of what were really mere affairs

* General Pau's command.

of outposts. What had happened on Monday, the 17th was that the German frontier detachments had fallen back slowly, fighting delayed actions mostly on a very large scale. No guns or prisoners were left in the hands of the French. The fact that on the left front of the advance the Germans had abandoned Château Salins and that Foch's divisional cavalry had entered the place showed that there was to be no battle for the actual frontier. The Fifteenth Corps was in the lake region; the Sixteenth Corps was advancing on Sarrebourg junction from the west; while the Eighth Corps of Dubail's army was pushing up to it from the south. Here there was some more serious fighting.

On Tuesday, the 18th, Foch occupied Château Salins with his right column, and established his headquarters there. He thus held the junction of the Nancy-Morhange railway with the frontier line to Metz. On this line his left occupied Delme. Cavalry reconnaissances from Delmy and Nomeny gave no tidings of a German move from Metz. The French centre, advancing through the lake region, was approaching the main Metz-Strasburg railway, and there was some evidence that the enemy would soon make a stand, for the resistance offered by his retreating detachments was becoming more serious. On the right, Sarrebourg junction was occupied.

That afternoon a discovery was made which revealed the plans of the enemy. French advanced parties came under heavy artillery and machine gun fire, and careful reconnaissance revealed the fact that the Germans were holding a prepared battle position of considerable extent, entrenched along the front, not indeed on the elaborate system that developed during the war, but with well-placed field trenches, and gun pits for the

artillery. The entrenched line began on the right near Morville, and ran thence eastward by Morhange along a rise of ground south of the main railway line. It crossed the line near Bensdorf junction and then followed the upper slopes of a ridge north of the railway to Fenestrange on the Saar. Beyond the river it was continued up the wooded declivity of the northern Vosges to where Phalsbourg lay circled by its old ramparts. The left of the line thus rested on the Vosges, while the right had Metz a few miles to its rear—a safe protection against a turning movement.

De Castelnau decided to attack, and there was serious fighting for the ground in front of the position, on Wednesday, the 19th. Thus began the battle of Morhange, the first great battle of General Foch's career.

August 19th was a day of preliminary operations in front of the enemy's position. Some progress was made. On the right, the division detached by Dubail from his army was held north of Sarrebourg; but the Sixteenth Corps pushed forward west of the town in the direction of Fenestrange. In the centre, the Fifteenth Corps advancing from Dieuze, captured the village of Vergaville, and gained a few hundred yards of ground further towards Bensdorf junction. Foch stormed the village of Conthil on his right front, and along the rest of his line towards Delme secured all the northern margin of the Forest of Château Salins. The main position was still intact, and it was only late in the day that its full strength was revealed. Well placed in the hilly ground, and largely masked by clumps and belts of wood, it revealed itself only when the advance came fairly close up to its front. It was evidently strongly held. In the

afternoon the fire of the German batteries all along the line became intense, and every open space in which the French advance showed itself was swept by a hail of machine gun fire.

The attempt to storm this formidable line was made on the 20th. For the task De Castelnau had his three army corps and the 16th Division sent to his help from the First Army. Dubail could not afford him any further support for the time being, for he had to hold the Vosges positions from the Donon southwards against Von Heeringen's army, and protect the left of the advance which General Foch with the army of Alsace was attempting into the Alsatian plain.

At the time, the French had not discovered the superiority in numbers possessed by the enemy. But we now know that on the morning of August 20th Prince Rupert of Bavaria was holding his entrenched position in the wooded hills with the three Army Corps of the Bavarian army, the Nineteenth (2nd Saxon) Army Corps, and the 1st Reserve Corps. Further, Von Heeringen had detached a corps from his right to attack the 16th Division near Sarrebourg. Thus on the German side six corps would be in action against three and a half corps of the French. It must further be noted that at the outset of the war a German corps was usually stronger in numbers than a French corps. It is quite clear therefore that Prince Rupert's army very heavily outnumbered that of De Castelnau. The Bavarian Prince had the further advantage that his entrenched line fairly bristled with artillery, and machine guns, and howitzers, partly fortress guns brought from the arsenal of Metz. The artillery of the defence was much more powerful than that of the attack.

The battle was fought on a front of nearly forty miles, from near Delme on the left to beyond Sarrebourg on the right. In the early morning the positions of De Castelnau's three army corps were:—

16th Corps (Taverna) on the right about Bisping:
15th Corps (Espinasse) in the centre, right and left of Vergaville.
20th Corps (Foch) from Conthil to Delme.

The chief part in the attack was assigned to Foch's two divisions. The 11th Division was launched against Rodalbe, the 39th against Marthil. They were met by a storm of high explosive shells and a hurricane of machine gun fire. Losing heavily, the 11th Division made some progress. Its leading regiment, the 26th of the line was for some time in the German entrenchments, and sent back 115 prisoners of the Saxon Corps. The regiment, heavily counter-attacked, clung doggedly to the ground it had won, but got no farther forward. Along the centre and right of the line, the German front was nowhere broken into. The attack came to a dead stop under the tempest of the enemy's fire. Whole batteries were put out of action by the howitzer shells, and there were no heavy guns with which to beat down this hostile fire. The infantry was suffering serious and continuous loss in its fruitless efforts to push forward through the woods, and found its progress barred by wire beyond which the enemy's machine guns were in action wherever the French tried to break through the obstacles.

It was a blazing summer day, and by noon the men were exhausted with their fruitless efforts. The

Provençal corps was badly shaken by its serious losses. The enemy, fighting under cover, had suffered little, and his men were comparatively fresh. It was now that Prince Rupert made his great counter-attack. It began in the centre, heralded by a tremendous burst of shell fire. The Provençals gave way before the waves of grey-clad infantry that poured forward on both sides of the Bensdorf railway. Guns were abandoned, and there was something approaching a rout. The centre was broken. Foch, in his advanced position, was in serious peril. The Nancy men were forced out of the trenches they had won, by an attack in front, combined with another from the right flank. It seemed that, with the centre broken, there would not be merely a defeat but a terrible disaster.

It was in this crisis of the battle that Foch lost two of his best young officers, both bearing famous names, Guy de Cassagnac and Lieutenant Xavier de Castelnau, a son of the Commander-in-Chief. De Castelnau was told of his son's death, while he was busy with his staff arranging for the general retreat that was to save the broken line from destruction. He paused in silence for just a moment with down-bent head, and then said, "Gentlemen, we must get on with our work;" and continued his orders in imperturbable calm.

Foch had already recognized that the battle was lost, and with his steadfast Lorrainers—the men of "steel" and "iron"—was preparing for a fighting withdrawal. A heavy outburst of artillery away to the north-westward of Delme told him that the battle was suddenly extending in this new direction. A Bavarian Reserve Corps from the Metz garrison was being pushed out towards the flank of the French line. But the possibility

of this stroke had been foreseen and provided for. It was parried by the French Reserve Divisions, which had entrenched the ground between Nomeny and Delme, and not only stood fast against the Bavarians, but made a successful counter-attack.

Trusting to this defence holding good, Foch dealt with the more serious and pressing danger in the centre. He was able to save the Provençal corps from complete destruction, and cover its retreat by counter-attacking with the 11th Division on the flank of the advancing enemy. Then he fought a series of rearguard actions with the troops of the German right, as they pressed forward towards Château Salins. The broken forest-clad ground north of the town was skilfully used in his fighting retreat through the long hours of the afternoon. On the other flank Dubail hurried up reinforcements to cover the retreat of the Sixteenth Corps.

In the evening the enemy's efforts gradually slackened, and the army was able to halt on the line Jalancourt-Château Salins-Marshal-Maizières. The entrenched heights of the Grand Couronné secured the left rear and formed a pivot for a further retirement.

As usual with official announcements when things are not going well in war, the French bulletins told only part of what had happened. The communiqué, issued by the Paris War Office, on August 20th, reported that after reaching Morhange, Delme and Dieuze, the advance in Lorraine had been checked "before fortified organizations strongly held." As a matter of fact, Morhange had not been reached. It was in the German entrenched line or slightly to the rear of it. The communiqué published on the 21st—the day after the lost battle—told only of a counter-attack having driven in the

advanced guards upon the main body. This was a piece of very daring official *camouflage.*

The German bulletin described the result of the battle as a brilliant victory, with the capture of eighty guns and several thousand prisoners, adding that the French army of Lorraine was in full retreat. It was certainly an inspiring success for the enemy. It was the first serious encounter with the French army, and the only great battle fought within the German frontier on the Western Front during the war.

In his forecast of a war with Germany written years before, Foch had taken into account the possibility of a check at the outset followed by a retreat. He was not the man to be discouraged by the adverse chance of war. He had again and again laid it down, that defeat is only serious when it is accepted as defeat that breaks the "will to conquer" and the determination to fight on. Hence his saying,—"A battle gained is a battle in which one is determined not to admit that one is beaten."

So on the lost battle of Morhange he was neither disheartened nor over-anxious. The fight was only a first episode in a long struggle, as to the ultimate result of which he had no fear. Meanwhile he had at last had the experience of actual battle. He had led an army corps in action under the most trying conditions; he had met a terribly dangerous crisis in the fight with swift resolution, and helped to save the whole army from destruction. His own splendid corps had done well, and he felt it was thoroughly in his hands and ready for further efforts. Meanwhile he busied himself with preparations for the fighting retirement across the Seille and the Meurthe.

His chief, De Castelnau had already decided on the

main lines of the movement. The Second Army was to fall back to a new position on the French side of the frontier, covering the Trouée de Charmes—the gap in the eastern fortress barrier—with the entrenched camp of Toul on its left and that of Épinal on its right. On this side, Dubail with the First Army would co-operate in the next battle. Nancy and the Grand Couronné would be held against the enemy.

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF THE TROUÉE DE CHARMES

On August 21st—the morrow of the Battle of Morhange—a welcome reinforcement reached the Second Army. It was made up of three infantry brigades and several batteries of artillery belonging to the Ninth Army Corps, which had mobilized at Tours.

The Ninth Corps had been originally destined for De Castelnau's army; but, just before the offensive was ordered, the troops belonging to it, which had already reached eastern France, had been sent away to strengthen the Third Army under De Ruffey. A delay in the mobilization of the three brigades led to their being sent to the original destination of the whole corps, when the news arrived of the serious resistance met with by the Second Army on August 19th. De Castelnau placed them under the command of General Leon Durand, and sent them to reinforce the Reserve Divisions holding the entrenchments of the Grand Couronné. This set free the troops of the Twentieth Army Corps which Foch had already assigned to this position, and thus enabled him to have his whole corps at his disposal for the important task which De Castelnau now entrusted to him. The Twentieth Army Corps was to act as the rear guard of the whole army, and cover its retirement across the Meurthe to the new battle positions.

The retreat across the frontier—begun on August

21st—was announced in the French official communiqué of the 22nd, which while still avoiding any admission as to the lost battle, stated that "the importance of the enemy's forces engaged in Lorraine did not allow of the retention of the ground that had been won, except at too great a cost." As a set-off to this disappointing news, it was announced that General Pau had occupied Mulhouse and captured twenty-four guns and several thousand prisoners.

On August 21st, Foch re-crossed the river Seille; and during this and the following day there was some fighting, as his corps covered the retirement to the new line. He protected the crossings of the Meurthe by holding a position from the southern slopes of the Grand Couronné to the line of high ground along the south side of the Marne and Rhine Canal and the little river Sanon. His front formed a re-entrant angle, so as to bring a cross fire of artillery on the approaches to the bridges. During the 21st, though there was some firing, the enemy made no serious attack; but on the 22nd the pursuit was hotly pressed, and there was hard fighting.

Foch held that day the heights on the left bank of the Meurthe above and below St. Nicolas, covering the river crossings with his artillery fire. The 4th Chasseurs defended the bridge of St. Nicolas. On the right bank, a brigade of the 11th Division with several batteries held the heights about Flainval against repeated attacks, and only withdrew across the river after dark, blowing up the bridges. By nightfall, the retreat across the Meurthe had been successfully completed. The only French troops left on the right bank were those that held the Grand Couronné.

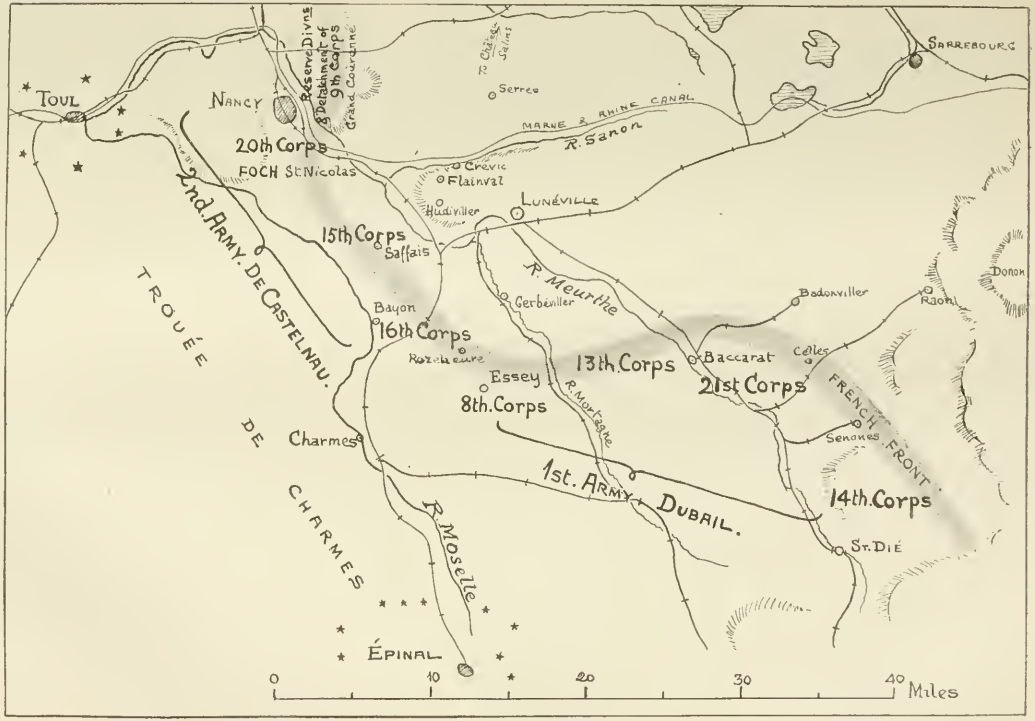
It was while he was preparing for battle that Foch

heard the news of a double personal loss. On August 22nd in the battle of the Ardennes, his only son, Lieutenant Germain Foch had been killed in action, and also his son-in-law, Captain Bécourt.

On Sunday, August 23rd, the Second Army was in position on its chosen battle ground for the defence of the Charmes Gap. Before following further the course of events on this front, let us see what was happening elsewhere on the long line. Without taking note of these events, the full importance of the battle for the Gap cannot be understood.

While the Second Army was retiring across the Meurthe, the French offensive had developed along the northern frontier. On Friday, August 21st, the Third and Fourth armies under De Ruffey and De Langle had advanced into the wooded Ardennes. On the 22nd, they were defeated by the Crown Prince and the Duke of Wurtemburg. Want of cohesion between the columns advancing through the difficult forest and hill country, inferior numbers, weakness in heavy artillery and machine guns, and finally a deficiency of aircraft accounted for the failure. The French fell back across the frontier to make a stand on the line of the Meuse.

On the same Saturday, De Lanrezac's army on the Sambre was attacked and defeated by Von Bülow. On Sunday, the 23rd, while De Castelnau's army was taking up its positions to hold Nancy and the Charmes Gap, the British Expeditionary Force was fighting its first battle at Mons, and late that evening its retreat began. Namur had fallen. De Lanrezac was already in full retreat, and the Third and Fourth armies had soon to abandon their positions on the Meuse. The whole line along the northern frontier was falling back.



Battle of the Trouée de Charmes.

So on the morning of Monday, August 24th, when the battle of the Trouée de Charmes began, De Castelnau knew that there had been a series of defeats in the North, and the German invasion was pouring into France like a flood that has swept away a river bank.

In front of the Second Army the Germans had occupied Lunéville and thrown a number of bridges across the Meurthe. As the result of the lost battle, Dubail had abandoned the Donon heights and the neighbouring line of the Vosges. Pau was withdrawing from Mulhouse and the Alsatian plain to hold the mountain frontier. Official accounts of the operations that followed say that Dubail with the First Army was ordered by General Joffre and the headquarters staff to combine with De Castelnau's army in the fight for the Charmes Gap. But before receiving the order, he had already decided to take this course, and was helping his colleague most effectively.

The Trouée de Charmes is geographically the opening between the southern end of the Meuse heights (Côtes de la Meuse) which extend from Verdun to Toul, and the long spur of the Vosges that forms the heights of the right bank of the upper Moselle. Both these lines of heights are fortified. As already noted, Séré de Rivières, when he planned the new defences of France, left the Gap open. German critics wrote of it as the "erwunschte Durchbruckstellung," the "desired breaking-through point" for an invasion, a trap set for the German invader where he would have to fight with fortresses on his flanks or rear and a French army holding the hills of the Faucilles country in front.

Perhaps this was De Rivières' idea—an attempt to canalize the invasion. Behind the Gap, the little town

of Neufchâteau, a place of no importance before the war of 1870, was made the meeting point of no less than six railways, and protected by a fort. It looked like an intended centre of concentration. In 1895, when the French army, after the signature of the treaty of alliance with Russia, executed manœuvres on a huge scale in the presence of a Russian military mission of eighty officers under General Dragomiroff. The idea of the manœuvre campaign was that an "eastern army" had penetrated into the Faucilles through the Gap of Charmes. It was attacked and driven back by the "western army." Naturally, everyone interpreted the manœuvres as a rehearsal of a fight with a German invader coming through the Gap. But if the trap scheme ever existed, it had been long abandoned before the Great War of 1914. The idea of the battle which began on August 24th was to deny the Gap to the invader by meeting him, not behind it, but in front of it, with De Castelnau's Second Army based on Toul and Nancy, and Dubail's First Army based on Épinal.

The fortresses had still their use, and if the battle were lost the Gap would afford a safe line of retreat to other good positions in the Faucilles. The Gap itself would have afforded an excellent line on which to fight the battle. It is not much more than twenty miles wide, if we exclude on either flank the ground actually swept by the guns mounted in the forts of Toul and Épinal. But to make a stand on this shorter line would have entailed the sacrifice of Nancy. That the French leaders chose to fight in advance of such a tempting position shows how confident they were in their men, despite the failure before the Morhange entrenchments.

But, as the map shows, their plan enabled a trap of another kind to be laid for Rupert of Bavaria. De Castelnau's battle line, with its left on the heights of the Grand Couronné, and running southwards by Saffais towards Essey, formed almost a right-angle with Dubail's line, which ran from Essey by Baccarat to the Vosges. The German advance must either be frontal against one army, exposing a flank to the other, or must form a sharp salient enveloped by the French from the outset.

On Sunday, August 23rd (the day of Mons), the Germans had occupied Lunéville and were advancing towards the Gap. Next day the great battle began on a front of about forty-five miles.

We cannot give any exact estimate of the force which Prince Rupert brought into action; but it appears that, besides the Saxon and Bavarian troops, which had fought in the first battle, he had the support of a considerable part of Von Heeringen's army on his left.

Prince Rupert's plan for the battle was to break the French right—Dubail's army. He made an attempt to turn the flank by forcing the Pass of St. Marie in the Vosges with a corps of Von Heeringen's army. Here, during the 24th, the Fourteenth French Army Corps, reinforced by troops from the garrison of Épinal, steadily repulsed repeated attacks on the Pass and the heights on both sides of it. Meanwhile the Bavarians had pushed along by the Meurthe valley, and at Celles and Baccarat the Twenty-first Corps had to hold its own all day against superior numbers. But De Castelnau's front was also attacked. Advancing across the Mortagne valley on both sides of Gerbéviller, the Germans flung themselves in dense masses against the high

ground from Saffais to Rozelieure, where the position was held by the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Corps. The Fifteenth—the men of Provence—amply redeemed their failure of a few days before, by their steady resistance. On the right of De Castelnau's line, about Essey, Conneau's cavalry fought dismounted, supported by a division of the Eighth Corps. Here the attack was pressed furiously for hours. "The enemy's columns were everywhere," wrote one of Conneau's officers. "They were coming up in all directions from the river (the Mortagne), uniting on each side of the Lunéville-Bayon road, which ran through our position. At the same time the bombardment began. Shells and shrapnel rained on the Plateau."

As soon as the first German attacks had been repulsed and it was evident that the line was holding on firmly to the positions, De Castelnau organized a counter-attack. The enemy had not ventured to assail the entrenched heights of the Grand Couronné, and De Castelnau was able to detach from its garrison the 70th Reserve Division and two of Durand's brigades of the Ninth Corps—the Thirty-fourth and Thirty-fifth. These were placed at General Foch's disposal, in addition to his own Army Corps. The Twentieth Corps crossed the Meurthe by bridges, under the cover of the guns of the Grand Couronné; and Foch led it against the heights beyond the Sanon, north of Lunéville, while the other detachments were pushed forward towards the Lunéville-Château Salins road, north of the Marne and Rhine Canal. It was a turning movement against the German right flank and rear, threatening to cut their communications, and endangering their whole position. It is evident that

the capture of the heights above the Sanon would be fatal to the whole German advance. The Germans saw the danger, and hurried up troops to meet the counter-attack; but their main masses were already committed to the attack far to the south and west. By nightfall, General Fayolle with the French 70th Division was within two and a half miles of Serres on the Château Salins road, while Foch had reached the heights beyond the Sanon and stormed Flainval and the neighbouring villages, and cleared the wood of Crévic of the enemy.

On Tuesday, the 25th, Rupert still persisted in his attacks, from Saffais to beyond Baccarat, while counter-attacking to regain the ground so perilously lost, to the northward. Fayolle could make no further progress. Foch found that all he could do was stubbornly to maintain himself on the heights he had won the day before. Attacked again and again, he held on to what he held to be the decisive point of the battlefield. But to feed these attacks on the heights and to hold the Château Salins road, Prince Rupert had to withdraw considerable forces from his main battle line. His reserves were becoming exhausted; and early in the afternoon it was evident that the German attacks were everywhere losing their vigour. At 3 P.M. De Castelnau realized from the reports he received at his headquarters near the outer forts of Toul, that the time was come for a final effort. He telegraphed the order: "*En avant partout et à fond,*"—"Forward everywhere and drive it home."

The French now assumed the offensive; and Rupert of Bavaria with his army in the midst of a huge arc of converging fire, and attacked from north, west and south, speedily realized that to prolong the unsuccessful battle might be to court disaster. The German

retreat began. But the Bavarians and Saxons though defeated were not routed. Not a gun was lost. The grey masses streamed back, fighting as they went, through the wide gap between the Château Salins road and the Vosges. They retired during the following days towards their own frontier, but they fought a series of steady rearguard actions, and finally halted on the border waiting to renew the attempt. They had lost heavily in their reckless and persistent massed attacks on the Trouée de Charmes positions. It was a serious defeat, and for awhile no effort was spared to conceal it from the German people and the other German armies. It was a severe disappointment to the German High Command, coming as it did in the midst of a series of successes on the other fronts. It was utterly unexpected; for after his victory at Morhange, Prince Rupert thought that it would be no difficult matter to crush the armies of De Castelnau and Dubail.

General Joffre made it the subject of a stirring order of the day, addressed to the other armies, in which he held up to them the success of the eastern armies as an encouragement and an example. It was the first great victory won for France, and one may say that it made the victorious stand on the Marne possible. Had the Prince forced the Trouée de Charmes, a new tide of invasion would have poured through the gap in the eastern barrier, coming out in the rear of the long French line, probably isolating Verdun from the upper Marne region, and preventing the stand that was made a few days later by the Allied armies, with the right on the barrier, the left on Paris. The Allies would have been forced to fall back at least as far as the line of

the Seine, and the whole aspect of the campaign would have been altered for the worse.

Foch had taken a decisive part in this all-important success. He had proved himself a trusty leader, alike in defeat at Morhange and in victory at the Trouée de Charmes. His merit was to be promptly recognized by giving him a still more important command and the opportunity of rendering even more striking services to his country and to the Allied cause.

CHAPTER XI

THE NINTH ARMY IN THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

Early on Saturday, August 29th, while he was watching one of the regiments driving in a German outpost on the frontier line, Foch received a telegram, ordering him to hand over the command of the Twentieth Army Corps to General Balfourier and come to Châlons to see General Joffre, and take a more important post.

Ninety miles of good road are soon covered, when one has a staff car at one's disposal. Foch was at Châlons in the forenoon of the same day, and found Joffre at his headquarters there. The Commander-in-Chief congratulated him on the splendid work he had done at Nancy, and told him to take command—not of another Army Corps, but of a group of corps—the Ninth Army.

The general situation was rapidly discussed. All the northern armies were in retreat since the beginning of the week, and for the moment there was no immediate prospect of the retreat being stopped. The very city, in which the two generals were meeting, would soon have to be abandoned to the enemy. But Joffre meant to make a stand as soon as the German pursuit showed signs of exhaustion and the armies could be brought into line on a favourable position. It might be on the Marne, but it might be necessary to fall back to the Seine. Paris might be attacked. The Government had been removed to Bordeaux.

Where was the Ninth Army, which Foch was to command? It had yet to be got together. In fact his first task was to be its assembly and organization. It was to be made up of the following bodies of troops:—

Eleventh Army Corps—General Eydoux.
Thirty-fourth and Thirty-fifth Brigades of the Ninth Army Corps—General Dubois.
42nd Division—General Grosetti.
52nd Reserve Division—General Battesti.
60th Reserve Division—General Joppe.
Morocco Division—General Humbert.
9th Cavalry Division—General de l'Espée.

In many popular histories of the Great War, the Ninth Army is described as a reinforcement to the French battle line provided by troops that had become available after the first mobilization. But every unit in it was already somewhere in line, either in the eastern armies or in those that were retiring from the northern frontier. The only fresh troops were drafts from the depôts arriving to make up for some of the losses already incurred. The formation of the new army did not add a single battalion, battery or squadron, to the total available French fighting force. There was, it is true, some reinforcement of the fighting line to the west of the fortress barrier, by the withdrawal of part of the new organization from the eastern front. But the main fact was that Joffre had decided that Foch should be in a position to render more serious services to France than those of a corps commander, by being put in command of an army at the head of which he would have freer scope for his remarkable knowledge of war and powers of leadership. No higher tribute was ever paid by one great general to another. It was

an honour to Foch; but it was also honourable to Joffre, for one of the highest qualities of a commander-in-chief in war is the capacity for selecting his subordinate commanders.

The only troops withdrawn from the eastern frontier region were the two brigades of the Ninth Army Corps. These were part of the reinforcement sent to Nancy after the battle of Morhange, and had been engaged with Foch's Army Corps in the great counter-attack that decided the victory of the Trouée de Charmes. They did not join the Ninth Army till September 4th, on the eve of the battle of the Marne.

The rest of the new army came from the armies that had already been engaged on the Belgian frontier, and were now in retreat southwards. The only unit actually available, when Foch met Joffre at Châlons, was General Joppe's 60th Division. It had fought under General de Langle in the Fourth Army, and had taken part in the battle of the Ardennes on the river Sémois, and in the subsequent attempt to hold the line of the Meuse against the German advance. It had been engaged in the battle at Donchéry, * close to the old battlefield of Sedan.

General Eydoux's Eleventh Army Corps, the only complete corps to be handed over to Foch, had its peace headquarters at Nantes. It was made up of the soldiers of Brittany and La Vendée, good fighting material and men for whom Foch had a special bond of sympathy. They were "his Bretons," men of his new homeland, who like himself were inspired by the old faith of

* Donchéry was the point, where on the night before the battle of Sedan, the army of the Crown Prince (afterwards the Emperor Frederic) crossed the Meuse to interpose between MacMahon and the line of retreat on Mezières.

France. They had been with De Langle in the march into the Ardennes. D'Espée's Cavalry Division had been with them in the same fighting. The 42nd and 52nd Divisions had been in the Third Army under Ruffey, and had taken part in the advance against the Crown Prince's army on the Luxemburg border. The Third Army, now transferred to the command of General Sarrail was concentrated about Verdun. The Morocco Division—Zouaves and Marine from North Africa—had reached the northern front on August 22nd, but had not yet been seriously engaged. It was to be commanded by General Humbert who had taken part in the battle of the Charmes Gap with the detachments of the Ninth Army Corps.

Within a week the new army was concentrated and organized. It was a difficult piece of work. A staff had to be improvised. Only one division was near at hand; the rest were mostly on the move from the north. Foch had to get in touch with them by telephone, telegraph or messenger, arrange for their future movements that would bring his whole force together in one mass, organize supply arrangements and reserves of ammunition—and all this in the midst of the ceaseless strain of the retreat. Looking back on this strenuous week, Foch said later, of the beginnings of the Ninth Army,—"We were like a poor household. There was a staff of five or six officers hastily got together to start with, little or no working material, only our note-books and a few maps." One of these first staff officers, Commandant Réquin, tells how on the first night the new staff found it difficult even to obtain quarters, and he himself slept in the guard-room of a village among the soldiers, in order to make sure of being able to rejoin

his General and the rest of the staff in the morning. "One must imagine," he adds, "the difficulties of organization and command of an army formed in the course of the falling-back movements which prepared the victory of the Marne, among the crowds of the population fleeing before the horrors of invasion and encumbering the roads, without the possibility of stopping for a single day."

On September 4th, Foch had his headquarters at Tours-sur-Marne a few miles to the east of Épernay. It was a convenient position for collecting his divisions and brigades from the two armies of D'Esperey and De Langle. It was between their general lines of retirement; and his army was to take its place between them when the battle line was formed. Here on the 4th the concentration was joined by the two brigades from Nancy and the Ninth Army was practically complete, six days after its formation had begun.

Next day he moved his headquarters some miles further south to the village of Bergères-en-Vertus, at an important road-junction near the town of Vertus and on the road southwards to Fère Champenoise and Arcis-sur-Aube. He was now in the country which was soon to be the scene of the great battle. But the retreat was still in progress, and the tide of invasion flowed steadily onwards. That day the famous French aviator of peace days, Brindejonc de Moulinais, descended near his headquarters to report the results of a reconnoitring flight over the enemy's front. He told how he had seen masses of the enemy about Rheims and four army corps marching across the plain of Châlons—"a magnificent spectacle." It was Von Bülow's army that was about Rheims, and the columns crossing the plain of Châlons

were the Saxon army under Von Hausen. These were the enemies that Foch would soon have to oppose.

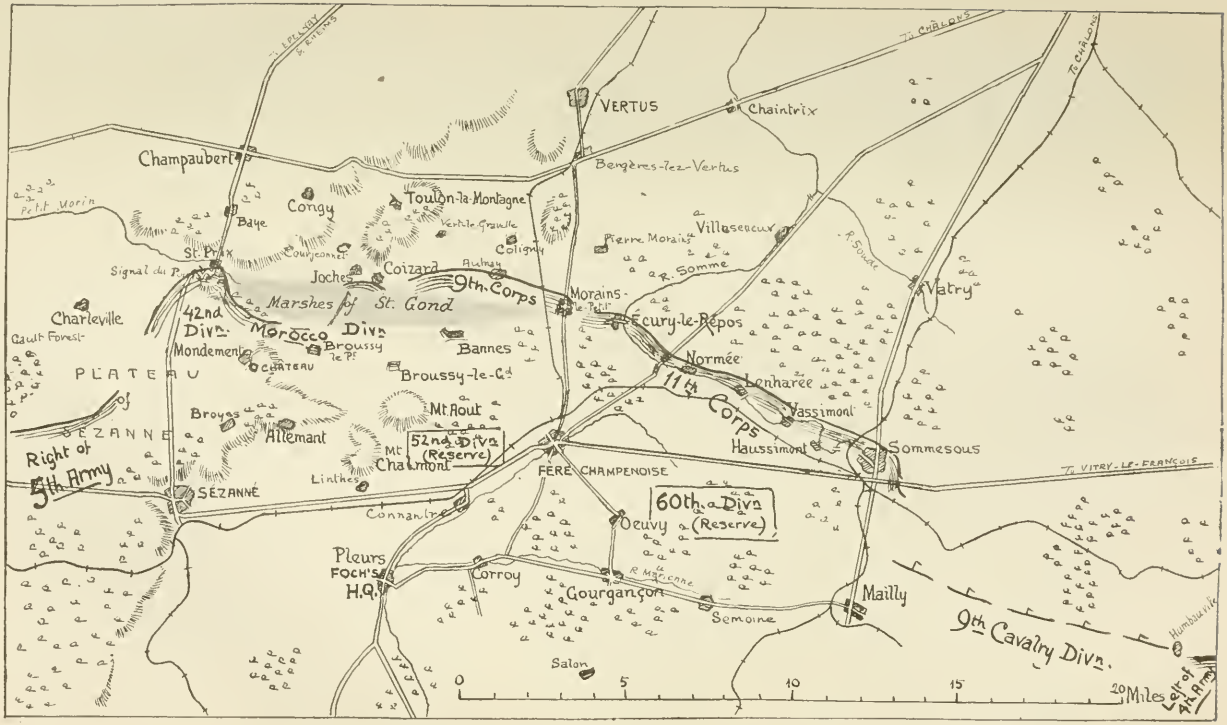
Next day (September 5th) the Germans had a division in Vertus, and the headquarters of the Ninth Army were moved further south, and Foch had his force concentrated on the line Sézanne-Fère Champenoise. There was to be no further retreat. This was the day on which General Joffre met Sir John French to communicate to him the plans for the coming offensive, and drafted the stirring order of the day which was read next morning to every regiment in the French army:—

"At a moment when a battle on which the welfare of the country depends is about to begin, I feel it my duty to remind you that it is no longer the time to look behind. We have but one business in hand—to attack and repulse the enemy. Any of the armies which can no longer advance, will at all costs hold the ground it has won, and allow itself to be killed where it stands rather than give way. This is no time for faltering, and it will not be tolerated."

On that Sunday morning, September 6th, the battle of the Marne began—a battle that was to last for five days on a front of over a hundred-and-twenty miles, between Paris and Verdun. We have only to deal here with the part played in it by General Foch and the Ninth Army, which was placed in the centre of the long line at one of the points that proved to be of decisive importance in the struggle.

First, a word as to the ground on which the Ninth Army was to give battle against the left of Von Bülow's army and the right of Von Hausen's. The district of Sézanne and Fère Champenoise is south of the great

northward curve of the Marne, between it and "hungry Champagne," the poorer lands of the province where the cultivated ground is interspersed with wide stretches of half-barren moorland and chalk downs, affording a scanty pasturage. It is a country of low round-topped ridges and hills, through which many deep narrow water-courses spanned by numerous old stone bridges make their way to the Marne. Westward, by Sézanne, begins the higher plateau that takes its name from the town, an upland with woods and vineyards clothing its slopes. The lower ground, the plain that extends eastward, has many stretches of woodland, mostly beech and fir plantations. Across it run the railway and the old highway road from Paris by Vitry on the Marne to Toul and Nancy. There are plenty of good roads running north and south through the district; but a few miles north of the Sézanne-Fère Champenoise front, there is a long hollow in the chalk hills that forms a green level expanse. It was a lake in early times. Long after, as it partly dried up, it was an impassable morass, the source on which the Petit Morin started on its course to the Marne. Much of it has now been reclaimed and turned into pasture; and two good roads and four unmetalled country lanes cross it. But there are still wide reaches of marsh, with shallow pools, and beds and thickets of brown rushes that grow six feet high by September. For the heavy traffic of an army only the two roads are practicable ways across this natural barrier, and in wet weather they become defiles through ground where a wheel would sink to the axle. The mediæval abbey of St. Gond, ruined at the Revolution, gives its name to this marsh region. First-class roads pass it on the east and west, from Épernay to Sézanne



Position of the Ninth Army. a.m. Sept. 6. 1914.

crossing the Petit Morin by the bridge of St. Prix, and from Vertus to Fère Champenoise.

Foch knew the district well. Among the exercises of the École de Guerre were "staff rides." These exercises are among the most useful methods of training in all European armies. They are manœuvres of officers. There are no troops on the ground, but an episode in an imaginary campaign is worked out as if they were present. Orders were written out, and situations discussed, as if an actual war were in progress. The director of the operations introduces sudden variations in the course of the supposed events, so as to test the capacity of his pupils for dealing with emergencies. It is a war game on the actual ground, often lasting for many days. While he was director of the École, Foch had conducted several of these staff rides on the ground on which he was to command in a great battle. This is one more instance of the remarkable way in which his work in the years of peace prepared him for his task in the war.

On Saturday, September 5th, a day that was cloudy in the morning, clear and intensely hot in the afternoon, the Ninth Army was retiring across its destined battle ground. No orders had arrived as yet to stop the retreat, and Foch had directed for that day a movement southward towards the river Aube, in fact some of the troops were to cross that river. The Germans of Von Bülow's left were over the Petit Morin, occupying the northern villages of the plateau of Sézanne. There was some skirmishing between them and French rear guards and patrols. At the other end of the marshes, Von Hausen's Saxons were advancing from the neighbourhood of Vertus in the direction of Fère Champenoise.

But the German march was strangely slow. By a more rapid push they could have peacefully occupied positions that they soon had to fight hard for. Perhaps the fatigue of the hurried pursuit from the north was telling upon them. Certain it is that, on this part of their front, great masses were halted for hours this day.

On the French side, the 4th Division was marching furthest to the westward, passing through Sézanne; next came the Morocco Division; then the Ninth Corps, marching by Fère Champenoise. The Eleventh Corps (the Bretons) was moving on Sommesous. The 52nd and 60th Reserve Divisions were well forward towards the Aube. De l'Espée's cavalry were partly supplying detachments to cover the retreat, partly moving south beyond the line of march of the Eleventh Corps, in order to form a line with De Langle's army further east.

About midday, there was a sudden halt in column after column, as a new order from General Foch reached the commanding officers. They were to stand fast, or in some cases to turn and retrace their steps for a certain distance. Foch had just had a message from Joffre, giving him the first intimation that the retreat was to end and the offensive to be resumed next morning. Later in the day, he received the order from Joffre for the operations of the morrow. It briefly described the task assigned to each army, leaving it to the army commanders to work out the details each for his own front. The part assigned to the Ninth Army was thus indicated:—

"The Ninth Army will cover the right of the Fifth Army, holding the debouches to the south of the marshes

of St. Gond and posting a part of the forces on the plateau to the north of Sézanne."

But Foch had not waited for the final order to act. As soon as he received the first intimation that the offensive was to be assumed next day, he had taken prompt steps to prepare the way for it not only by halting his army and putting it into line for the advance, but by advancing to attack the German outposts on his left flank in order to regain some of the useful ground that had been abandoned, according to earlier orders, in the morning. The battle of the Marne began, officially, on Sunday, September 6th. But Foch's left was in action between 3 and 4 P.M. on the Saturday afternoon.

He had again and again in his teaching laid it down that merely to hold positions is to court disaster, that attack is the best form of defence, and the more anxious is the situation the more boldly and persistently should one attack. Now the offensive had been ordered, and he at once chose his objective. Instead of simply holding on, south of the green hollow of the marshes—which would have fulfilled the letter of his instructions and might have satisfied a less enterprising leader, he decided on an attempt to seize the high ground to the north of them with his centre, while pushing his left forward to drive Von Bülow from the Sézanne plateau with the help of the troops of D'Esperey's army on this flank of his line.

In the morning the villagers on the border of the marshes had seen the French troops marching away to the southward. In the afternoon they returned. Batteries dragged up the slopes of Mont Août and the spur of Allemant, and moved by the Sézanne road to

the high ground near the village of Mondement and its old château. Other guns were placed in position on the crest that forms the southern wall of the marsh hollow. The 42nd Division, with Grosetti at its head—stout alike in body and in spirit—moved from Sézanne to the northeastern heights of the plateau near the same point. Then the Morocco division, eager for a fight, appeared in the villages of Broussy le Grand and Le Petit, marching for the roads across the hollow. The brigades of the Ninth Corps came up through Bannes. Towards four o'clock the French guns opened fire, and the German artillery replied from the heights of Congy and along the plateau towards Charleville and the Gault woods. Grosetti pressed on, and seized the crossing of the Petit Morin at the bridge of St. Prix, almost without resistance, for the sudden return of the French and their swift advance had taken the enemy by surprise. The Morocco Division crossed the marshes and cleared a small German detachment out of Joches and Coizard. A battalion of the Ninth Corps seized the wooded hill of Toulon-la-Montagne and got three batteries of 75's up to the crest. To the west of the hill, a German outpost was driven from Vert-la-Gravelle, Aulnay and Morains-le-Petit, at the east end of the marshes, were occupied without opposition by detachments of the Ninth Corps. Their patrols, sent out to the front, came in contact with the enemy's outpost line about Coligny and Pierre Morains, towards Vertus.

The fighting on the left died down in the twilight. On the right the Breton Corps (the Eleventh) was taking its positions along the course of the Somme,*

* The Somme of Foch's battlefield is, of course, not the river that flows by Peronne Albert and Amiens, but a small deep stream of the same name, that flows into the upper Marne. It is sometimes called the Somme-Champenoise.

marked by the line of villages from Ecurie-le-Repos to Sommesous. Here there were no enemies immediately in front; but the aviators and De l'Espée's cavalry scouts had ascertained that the Saxon troops of Von Hausen's army were not far off. They were along the upper Marne, where they had occupied Vitry-le-François. Their outposts were among the woods along the course of the river Soude, which runs parallel to the Somme for a few miles to the eastward and joins it lower down.

In the night, the enemy attacked the Morocco men in Joches and Coizard, and regained the two villages.

On the Sunday morning, when the great battle began all along the line from the banks of the Ourcq and the Grand Morin to the advanced works of Verdun, there was for more than an hour after sunrise a strange silence along the front of the Ninth Army. It seemed as if the enemy was hesitating to advance, and Foch was completing his preparations and putting together the latest information obtained by his reconnaissances. On his left the 42nd Division held the northeastern heights of the Sézanne plateau in touch with the Tenth French Army Corps, which formed the right of the Fifth Army under D'Esperey. Next came the Morocco Division, holding the south edge of the marsh hollow, with some detachments north of it; and then the two brigades of the Ninth Corps (17th Division), partly north of the marshes about Toulon la Montagne partly holding the ground at their eastern end about Morains le Petit. The Eleventh Corps then carried on the line at an angle, running southeast along the course of the Somme to Sommesous.

Here there was a gap of some ten miles between the

right of Foch's Ninth Army and the left of the Fourth Army (De Langle de Cary), south of Vitry le François. This gap was for the present watched, rather than held in any force, by De l'Espée with the 9th Cavalry Division (17th Hussars, 10th Chasseurs-à-cheval, 1st, 3rd and 24th Dragoons and 25th Cyclists, with a group of horse artillery batteries). It was a small force, twenty-four squadrons and twelve guns; and all that De l'Espée could do was to keep strong patrols out in front as far as Vatry in the early morning, and hold his main body ready for action in the open ground near Mailly. He was at the inner curve of a deep re-entrant of the French line; and if the Germans pushed towards the gap, there would be ample time for a converging counter-attack upon them by the right of the Ninth and the left of the Fourth Army.

For a reserve, Foch had the 52nd Division near the Mont Août and the 60th between Fère Champenoise and Sommesous, south of the road. He had massed a considerable part of his artillery on the heights near his left and centre to support the attack in this direction. For his post of command, or battle headquarters, he had selected a country-house near the village of Pleurs, well to the rear of his centre. In the great battles of to-day, extending over a front of many miles, the general in command can no longer as of old take his place close up to the fighting line, mounted, and surrounded by his staff. He may visit the fighting line for awhile; but for most of the time he is most likely seated at a table with maps before him, in a house that has been linked up with the field telegraphs and the permanent telegraph and telephone lines of the district. Assisted by his staff, he watches the course of the battle on the

map marked as the messages come in, and sends off his orders from time to time. It is a more prosaic business than that of a Napoleon or a Wellington watching the fighting at close quarters. But war has become an immense machine, and for the chief leaders a prosaic business of map-reading, collation of information, calculations as to time and space, available forces, and the supplies and reliefs for them. For hours the great leader of to-day has to see the battle only on his maps, as he sits in the centre of his system of telegraph wires, and listens to the cannon thunder miles away. At times, when there is a lull in the fighting, he may be able with the help of a swift car to inspect his line; or, when a great movement has been ordered, he may leave his right-hand man at headquarters and go himself to watch the progress of his troops. But usually, the higher is the command the general holds, the less he sees at close quarters of the fighting.

Foch was opposite the point where the flanks of two armies met in the great German line. Opposed to his left and left centre were two of Von Bülow's corps. On the left and near the Sézanne plateau was the 10th Army Corps, Hanoverians, some of the regiments bearing on their colours battle honours from Minden and Waterloo, won in the days when Britain and Hanover were under the same sovereign. Opposite the left centre, with headquarters at Vertus, was a corps of the Prussian Guard, in which one of the Kaiser's sons, Prince Eitel, was serving. Opposed to the French right were two Saxon army corps, the 12th and the 12th Reserve Corps. Foch had the equivalent of eight infantry divisions in line, and would be slightly outnumbered even if the German corps had only their normal peace

establishment of two divisions. But there is reason to believe that some if not all of them had received a third (reserve) division on mobilization, so that the French were seriously outnumbered. But the Germans had a further advantage in the possession of a considerable number of batteries of heavy guns and howitzers. The hills on their right, opposite Foch's left, fairly bristled with this powerful long-ranging artillery. The enemy was also far better supplied with machine guns.

Between seven and eight o'clock the guns came into action, first of the French left, and then all along the line. On the Sézanne plateau, the French attacked furiously from the Petit Morin southwards Charleville; and at first the 42nd Division gained ground steadily. Beyond the marshes the Morocco troops again attacked Joches and Coizard. Foch's order for this part of the field was that the division was to push forward through Courjeonnet to support the attack made by the men of the Ninth Corps on the Congy heights, with the help of the covering fire from the Toulon-la-Montagne crest and the hills south of the marshes. Here there was hard fighting during the morning. Attack after attack was launched against the German positions; but the Hanoverians held their ground. And as the morning went on, the artillery fire from the curve of the heights, from the south of Congy to the north of Vertus, became more intense. The enemy had a formidable concentration of heavy guns on these positions. Their converging fire was especially directed on the Toulon-la-Montagne height. Towards noon the village, the hill top, the woods, were wrapped in a pall of smoke and dust from the huge shells that burst in showers all over the ground. The trees of the wood were torn and shattered, the vil-

lage set on fire. In vain the light French quick-firers tried to beat down the heavy artillery to which they were opposed. The position became untenable, and had to be evacuated.

The retirement from the height was the signal for a fierce attack by the Hanoverians and the Prussian Guard, heralded and supported by a storm of artillery fire beating down from the heights on the villages of the lower ground. The Morocco men were driven back to the crossings of the marshes, and forced to retire along the narrow causeways, suffering heavily from a deadly fire of shrapnel and high explosives. North of the east end of the marsh, a regiment of the Ninth Corps held on steadily to Aulnay and the neighbouring ground; and a brigade of the same corps stopped the rush of the guardsmen at Morains le Petit on the Fère Champenoise road. At the other end of the marshes, the Hanoverians retook the bridge of St. Prix, and captured the bold hill up which the road zigzags beyond it—the Signal du Poirier. Most of the ground gained in the morning towards Charleville had to be abandoned. Grosetti held on, however, along the Sézanne road, without losing touch with D'Esperey's Tenth Corps on his flank.

In the afternoon, the Germans gained a footing south of the marshes. Their artillery had crowned the height of Toulon-la-Montagne; their infantry pushed forward from Coizard and Aunizeux, after the retiring Morocco troops. With the converging attack from these two directions, they fought their way into Bannes; but the French clung to the southern exits of the village. To the west of it, they held on to the villages of Broussy-le-Grand and Broussy-le-Petit, supported by the bat-

teries in position on Mont Août and the Allement spur of the Sézanne plateau.

On the right the situation was unchanged during the day. Here Foch's orders were to hold the line of the little Somme. His plan was defensive on the right, offensive on the left. And his line on the right had to be somewhat thinly held. Eydoux's Eleventh Corps had to defend a ten-mile front with a little over thirty thousand men, an average of about three thousand men to the mile; and beyond his right there was only the screen of De l'Espée's cavalry division. But during the Sunday there was no serious attack on this side.

The ground in front of the line was chalky moorland, with some cultivation near the villages, and beyond a wide expanse of stunted fir and beech woods, amidst which, here and there, were open stretches of poor pasture land for sheep. It was a typical landscape of "hungry Champagne." During the day, the Germans pushed forward to the edge of the woods and the artillery was in action all along the line, but there was no close infantry fighting—only the threat of an attack. On the flank, De l'Espée dealt with an attempt of the German cavalry to press forward, and drove them back so promptly, that they had no idea that the position in their front, the broad plain of Mailly, was almost without defence.

On the Monday, the 7th, the fighting began at the first light of dawn. On the left, the nearest unit of the Fifth Army, the Tenth French Corps gave useful support to Foch's hard-pressed line by clearing the Gault woods of the enemy and joining with Grosetti's left in the counter-attacks towards Charleville, but on the northeastern heights of the plateau and along its slopes

towards the marshes, things were not going so well. All day there was a succession of attack and counter-attack; ground was lost and regained, and lost again. The Morocco Division lent useful support to the 42nd in this prolonged struggle. General Humbert, who commanded these fine troops, himself came up to the plateau, and established his headquarters at the château of Mondement, which was gradually becoming the centre of the conflict on this side.

Mondement village stands on a bold spur of the Sézanne plateau, looking out northwards over the wooded slopes that sink down to the marshes of St. Gond. The château is a massively built quadrangle, with pepper-box turrets at the angles, and within, and sheltered by these mediæval defences, a modern mansion. Its dominant position on the crest of the spur made it a rallying point for the French defence, a magnet for the German attack. French popular writers at the time, in their narratives of the battle, described the château of Mondement as "the key of the whole marsh region"; but it had a mere local and almost accidental importance.

In the afternoon the enemy heavily reinforced his attack, and gained possession of the villages on the margin of the marsh, north of the Mondement spur. The position was now a sharp salient, projecting into the enemy's lines, and under fire from three sides. Field batteries on the Signal du Poirier sent plunging fire over the woods. Other guns were in action along the plateau and across the marshes. But the French clung steadily to the narrowed ground.

In the centre, Aulnay had to be abandoned. Morains-le-Petit, crushed by a concentrated howitzer fire, was in

flames and no longer tenable. The Prussian Guard pressed forward on both sides of the place, and by nightfall held the firm ground at the eastern end of the marshes.

Along the right front, the Saxons were attacking the villages on the Somme. Here too the German artillery was asserting its superiority. "We felt we were outgunned," wrote a French officer, who told of the ceaseless storm of shells that came from the enemy's batteries hidden in the woods beyond the Somme. But German narratives show that, on the side of the attack, there was during this day a sense of failure before a firm line strongly and bravely held. The villages, and the deep hollow of the river course concealed here and there in clumps of bush, formed a serious obstacle; and the Bretons fought well, met every attack with a sweeping fire of rifles and machine guns, and repeatedly charged with the bayonet to check the rushes of the Saxons. By nightfall the line was still intact.

The Germans had not gained much ground; but, on the French centre and left, they had made progress. On the left, the Tenth Corps of D'Esperey's army had been able to keep touch with Foch's flank on the plateau. The loss of Morains-le-Petit in the centre might prove to be a serious matter. Here the Prussian Guard had got so far forward, that a further advance would endanger the left of the Breton corps about Écury-le-Repos. Foch had sent in his reserves, Battesti's 52nd Division, to reinforce the left, Joppe's 60th Division to support Eydoux and the Eleventh Corps. He took an optimistic view of the situation. According to his own theory of war, determination to hold on and win was the first condition of success; and his orders of the day

sought to inspire his officers and men with his own hopeful courage. In the order of September 7th, he had told them that he counted on their displaying "the greatest activity and the most untiring energy," to improve their successes against "an experienced and daring enemy." In the order sent out in the early hours of the 8th, he described the situation as excellent, and directed that "the offensive should be vigorously maintained."

But before this order was communicated to the troops, there was a change in the situation that might well have broken the confidence of a less determined leader. At 3 A.M. on Tuesday, September 8th, in the darkness of the night, the two Saxon corps suddenly attacked all along the line of the Somme. At Normée, the outposts were swept away in a rush of grey-coated infantry, that poured out of the darkness of the woods; and the village was attacked, while its garrison were standing to their arms. It was stormed after a hard fight among the burning houses, and the French fell back to the railway line beyond the river. Écury-le-Repos was almost cut off, and could not hold out long. At Lenharée—which, though in Champagne sounds like one of the old Celtic names of Brittany—two companies fought for an hour against a heavy column of attack. Every officer was killed or wounded. When at last, about 4 A.M., the place was captured, a Saxon officer, marching through with his men, seeing the wounded French officers with a group of their disarmed soldiers, brought his own troops to the parade step with shouldered rifles, and gave the order : "Salute our opponents—they are brave men!"

On the right of the line, Vaussimont, Haussimont and

Sommesous held out till some hours after daylight. It was not till 9 A.M. that Sommesous was stormed, and then there was a prolonged struggle at the railway triangle to the south of the village. De l'Espée brought up some of his squadrons and his horse batteries to prevent the flank of the broken line from being turned.

The situation was serious. Foch came up from Pleurs to assist in restoring it. Beyond the river, numbers of prisoners had been taken by the enemy, groups of men cut off from the bridges by the successful rush upon the villages. On the French side of the stream, the Breton corps was retiring in some confusion. There is disorder even after a successful attack; and, after a repulse like this there must be disorder that might easily degenerate into rout. Guns and wagons were galloping back, regiments were mingled together, and amid the retiring troops there was a wild flight of the villagers. But the Breton is a good fighting man; a rally was made along the railway line. The guns' reopening told that the Eleventh Corps was again in action.

Foch was undismayed by the peril of his right. "Bah!" he said to his staff officers, "if they are attacking us so furiously here, it must be because things are going badly with them elsewhere, and they are trying to get some compensation."

He rode up to a Breton regiment as it rallied, and pointing towards the Saxon line said, "My boys, you must kill those fellows to hold them back." "We will, mon Général," came a cheery reply from the ranks.

But the retirement of the Eleventh Corps had further unfortunate consequences. The rush of broken men and fugitive peasantry from Écury and Normée had come pouring into the artillery positions of the Ninth Corps,

and temporarily put several of General de Moussy's batteries out of action. At the same time the Prussian Guard attacked in front. The line fell back to form again for battle in the scattered woods from Mont Août to the village of Puits west of Fère Champenoise. The left of the Breton line had to be swung back to conform to this retirement. In the forenoon the French front ran from near Mailly, on a line south of the Sommesous -Fère Champenoise road, with the centre beyond the town in the woods; and the line was continued by Mont Août and the Allemant spur, with the sharp salient about Mondement still holding good and linking up on the plateau with the Fourth Army.

Fère Champenoise lies in a hollow. Its defence depends on the holding of the higher ground to the north and east of it. The Prussian Guard advanced into the place between 10 and 11 o'clock, joining hands with the Saxon right. Some of the tall grenadiers of Prussia came in at the parade step, with fife and drum playing a lively march. They evidently thought the battle was won—not only the centre of Foch's army broken through but the whole Ninth Army, which was itself the centre of Joffre's great battle line on the point of collapse. But Foch did not mean to be defeated. A story went round the French press, that he telegraphed to Joffre: "Situation excellent. My centre is broken and my right has given way, but I am attacking." The message does not seem a likely one. Foch would hardly send scant tidings that seemed to indicate disaster; but if not authentic, the message expressed the spirit of the man, who would not hear of failure and was determined to snatch victory even from the jaws of impending defeat.

For the moment his object was to hold the German advance, not by mere passive resistance, but by a series of counter-attacks: to steady his own men by the sense of local successes: to wear down the energy of the Saxon onset: to keep the Guards busy about Fère Champenoise: and meanwhile to prepare a counter-stroke that would restore the battle.

At 1 P.M., sixty guns, posted from the slopes of Mont Août to the farm of St. Sophie on the margin of the woods, opened on the ground about Fère Champenoise; and supported by their fire the 52nd Division (Battesti), withdrawn during the morning from the left centre, attacked the Prussian Guard and prevented them from gaining ground beyond the low ridge west of the town. Later in the afternoon, an attack was made from the Mont Août woods across the Bannes-Fère Champenoise road towards the railway. It was stopped dead by a huge array of German machine guns strung out on a front of a mile beyond the road. On the other side of the road, Eydoux's Bretons attacked towards Connantry, and gained ground for awhile, but towards nightfall had to fall back; and the Eleventh Corps by evening was south of the little Maurienne brook, by Corroy and Gourgançon, with the 11th Division about Semoine, and De l'Espée's troopers, cyclists and horse batteries still holding the flank about Mailly.

On the left, things were going better. D'Esperey's army had made good progress at the Sézanne plateau. His centre was up to the Petit Morin, and his most advanced troops had got into Montmirail, though his right had made much less progress. Grosetti's 42nd Division had scored heavily in a number of local counter-attacks, and was keeping touch with the advance of the Fifth

Army. Humbert's Zouaves and Marines were clinging to the ground about Mondement, but they were fiercely attacked by the Hanoverians in front and from the right; a huge concentration of artillery was raining its shells on the contested ground, and as the darkness came on it seemed that the old castle of Mondement was ablaze. At other points of the battlefield, burning villages reddened the sky. The whole front was wrapped in clouds of drifting smoke and dust.

All of Foch's reserves were in line and much ground had been lost. Weary men, lying down in their fighting positions to snatch a brief sleep, felt anxious enough as to what the morrow would bring. It seemed not unlikely that the French centre would be broken through, with disastrous consequences to the whole of Joffre's line.

CHAPTER XII

THE VICTORIOUS MANŒUVRE

In that night of September 8th, after a day of overwhelming anxieties, Foch drew up the orders that were to make the 9th a day of victory.

In examining his teaching at the École de Guerre, we have seen how he insisted on the supreme importance of the commander's "will to conquer," of his determination, of his calm combination of all the means in hand to attack and to give the decisive direction to the blow. "The army is for its chief," he said, "what the sword is for the soldier. It tells only through the impulse, the direction of the energy that he gives to it."

Napoleon had said: "It was not the Roman legions that conquered Gaul; it was Cæsar. It was not the Carthaginian soldiers, but Hannibal, that made Rome tremble. It was not the Macedonian phalanx, but Alexander, that penetrated into India. It was not the French army but Turenne that made a way to the Weser and the Inn. It was not the Prussian soldiers who defended Prussia for seven years against the three most formidable Powers in Europe; it was Frederick the Great."

As a teacher, he made the great master's words his own. The chief, the man, not the mere crowd of armed men, was the winner of victory. He was now to prove the fact by his own actions in command.

And how was the blow—the ideal victory-compelling

blow—to be directed? There must, if possible, be an element of surprise in it, not the surprise of the ambuscade and the like in the operations of little wars, but the tactical surprise, "the sudden intervention of unexpected force" striking hard and effectively and bringing to the opponent the sense of his inability to parry the blow, "the conviction that he cannot conquer, which is the same thing as saying that he is conquered." His will must be broken by this "unexpected blow of supreme vigour."

The point of attack must be well chosen. The enemy's line may seem to be standing fast like a breakwater against a rising tide, but, if the leader can see "a fissure in the edifice, a point of insufficient resistance, or if by a special combination he can add to the regular methodical action of the tide an effect like that of the blow of a battering ram capable of shattering the structure at one point, the equilibrium is broken down, and through the breach thus produced the mass at once pushes forward, bearing down every obstacle. We must seek for this fissure, this point of insufficient resistance, or make it by organizing for this purpose our battering-ram blow on one point of the enemy's line, so as to arrive at the same result. This is the manœuvre battle." *

Here was the theory of the manœuvre that was to save the Ninth Army and break the centre of the German battle line—a theory elaborated fourteen years earlier than the day when Foch made himself famous by its execution.

Normally for such a blow there should be a reserve in hand. But all Foch's reserves had been thrown into the

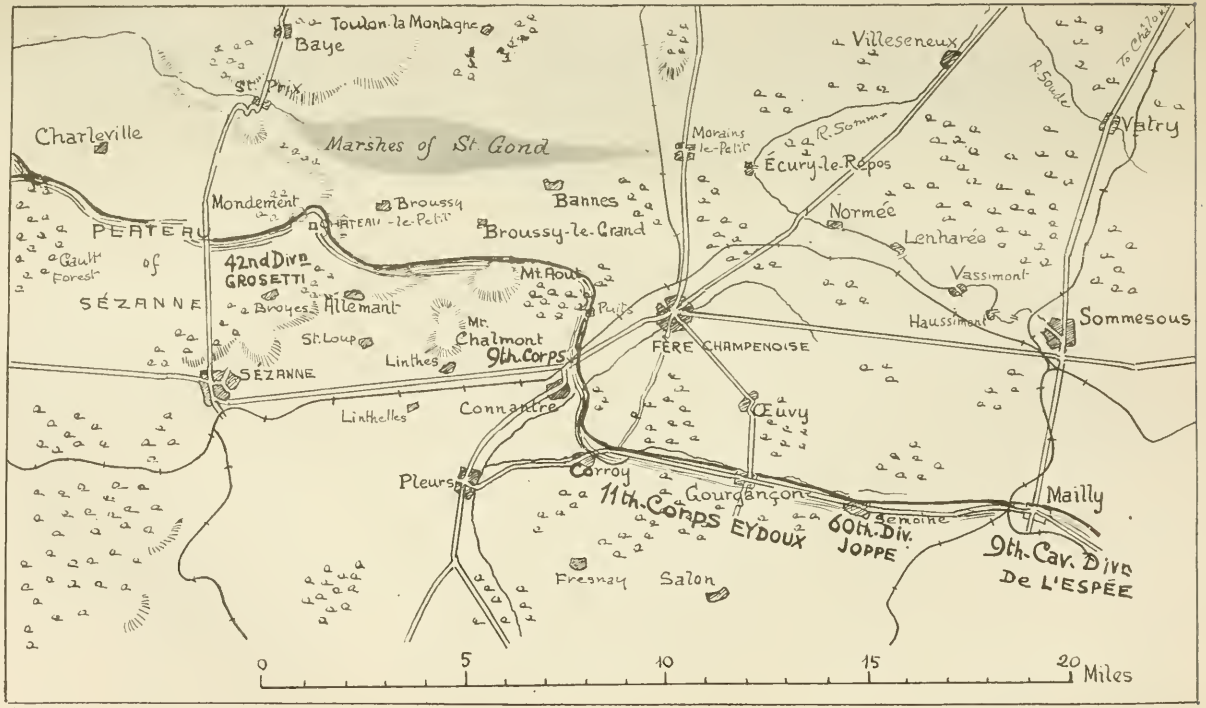
* *Principes de la Guerre*, p. 280.

fight during the anxious hours of September 8th. He must improvise a reserve and he could do this only by temporarily withdrawing it from his fighting line. What troops was he to take? Where was he to risk the weakening of his hard-pressed front? He made a bold decision, but one that at the same time showed how closely he had followed the developments of the long struggle and how well he could judge which leader, which division, was best fitted for the daring manœuvre he was planning.

Of all the troops engaged, Grosetti's division had shown most persistent enterprise in its repeated counter-attacks on the Hanoverian front near Mondement. It was to be withdrawn. A message was sent to D'Esperey, asking him to give what help he could to the left of the Ninth Army. And at 5 A.M. on September 10th, Grosetti received his orders for the day.

Humbert and the Morocco division were to hold on upon the left. Grosetti was to disengage his battalions and batteries from the fighting line. As soon as D'Esperey's men came up to relieve them, he was to get them together and march to a new front between Linthes and Pleurs, which he was to reach by midday. Arrived there, he was to push forward between the Ninth and Eleventh Corps, and fall upon the flank of the Saxons.

The actual wording of this important order (dated on the evening of the 8th) is interesting. "The 42nd Division, as soon as it is relieved by the Tenth Army Corps, will march by Broyes and St. Loup, to form a reserve for the army on the line Linthes-Pleurs. The point of to-morrow's manœuvre is to debouch by Fère Champenoise. Reports to be sent on all available forces and all activity in this direction. . . . Whatever the situation



Position of the Ninth Army at daybreak, Sept. 9, 1914.

of the Eleventh Corps, we count upon resuming the offensive against the front Connantre-Corroy, an offensive in which the Ninth Army Corps will co-operate on the line Morains-Fère Champenoise."

Foch believed he had found the "fissure"—the weak point in the enemy's front against which the battering ram was to be swung. Why had he chosen it? The Prussian Guard was being held about Fère Champenoise. Von Hausen's Saxons were pressing back the Breton corps, and by the evening of the 8th had gained more ground than the Guard, with the result that the Saxon right towards Corroy and Gourgançon was well south of the left of the Guard on the ridges near Fère Champenoise. There was not an actual opening in the enemy's line; but the meeting point of two separate commands, tending to move forward in even slightly divergent directions, is likely to be weak. Foch did not trust to probabilities. He had in his teaching again and again shown the danger of depending on theories as to what *must be* the enemy's position, instead of definitely ascertaining it. Reports from the fighting line showed that there was no strong body of the enemy holding the ground between the Guard and the Saxons. Here the battering ram could be driven home, the blow being aimed against Von Hausen's flank. Foch's note, that "whatever the situation of the Eleventh Corps" the offensive would take place in this direction, shows how well he judged the situation. He foresaw the probability of Eydoux's line being pushed further to the southwards, but he also judged that the Saxon advance in pursuit would if anything tend to weaken the enemy's line at the point he had selected for his stroke.

Of course a risk was being run; but there are seldom

certainties in war even as to the events of a few hours hence. *"Ça pouvait reussir, ça pouvait râter."*—"It might succeed, it might miss fire," said Foch, talking of his plan, some months later. But it was to succeed. And it had the element of the unexpected for the enemy. The Germans might well believe that Foch was at the end of his reserves, and could hardly imagine that he would be able to detach a whole division from his hard-pressed left, to bring it to the aid of his right. It was not the kind of manœuvre that the old-fashioned writers on tactics would have approved. But the element of surprise was supremely useful. A French writer has not inaptly compared it to the move of castling at chess, that suddenly at a critical moment brings a powerful piece unexpectedly into play. Foch was castling with Grosetti's division.

After issuing his orders to his generals, Foch wrote an order of the day to be read to every unit of his corps in the morning, so as to convey to officers and men his own confidence and determination. What he said at the outset of this proclamation, about the condition of the enemy, was his own deliberate judgment of the situation and no mere fiction for the encouragement of his men. He had noted the strange slowness of the Germans to follow up and enlarge the successes they had won. Their driving force must be nearly exhausted. Messages from Joffre told him they were giving way on other parts of the long battle line. Foch felt that a success against their centre would be decisive, and he meant to secure that success, and boldly predicted victory as the result of dogged resistance coupled with the blow he had planned. So he told his officers and men in his order of the day:

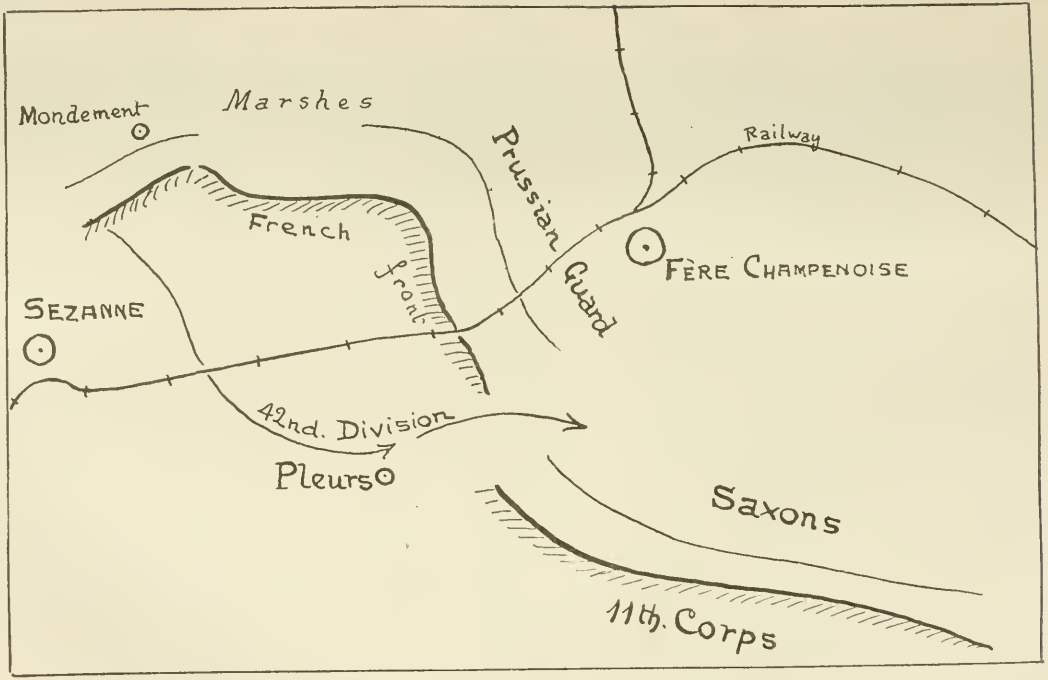


Diagram of Foch's manoeuvre of September 9th.

"The German army is in the last stage of exhaustion; the units and the orders are hopelessly entangled; the command has lost its bearings. The vigorous offensive of our troops has taken the enemy by surprise; he counted on our offering no further resistance. It is of the last importance to take advantage of this state of affairs. At this decisive hour, when the honour and the existence of France are at stake, officers must draw from the energy of our race the strength to hold out till the moment when the enemy shall retire exhausted. The disorder in the German ranks is the sign of our coming victory; our army has only to throw all its energy into the continuance of this struggle, to stop the enemy's advance and hurl him out of our country. But every one must be convinced that success is to those who hold out the longest."

Having thus done what he could to "organize victory," he confidently awaited the result. There must be many anxious hours before the decisive moment. What was to happen in the meantime?

Grosetti's men were not particularly pleased at the order to break off the fight on the plateau and march to a new position behind the battle line. "We are scoring here. Why do they take us away?" was what they asked. It took some time to get them all out of action. They were replaced partly by Humbert's Moroccans, partly by troops from the Tenth Corps of D'Esperey's army; but these last did not arrive till some hours had passed. Meanwhile a whole Hanoverian brigade had been flung against Mondement, and drove the French out of the village, and stormed the castle. But the enemy gained no further ground. Humbert first stopped their attempts to debouch from Mondement, and then counter-attacked with his troops. He had sent to Dubois of the Ninth Corps for help, and a regiment

hurried to reinforce him. Grosetti brought three of his batteries into action in support, leaving them to rejoin his line of march later on. The Germans showed an unexpected lack of enterprise on this side. They seemed content to hold what they had won, and for hours merely stood on the defensive against Humbert's series of attacks.

On the centre and right they were pressing the attack. The Saxons, making the most of their advantage of more powerful artillery and superior numbers—two corps against one and a half—were steadily forcing Eydoux's Eleventh Corps back from the line of the Maurienne. Fighting doggedly, the Bretons and the 60th Division had to abandon Corroy, Gourgançon and Semoine. De l'Espée had to retire from Mailly, in order to conform to the movement of the infantry. Midday came, but Grosetti had not arrived. He had not been able to assemble his division for hours after he received that order, and it was after eleven when he began the march from the plateau.

Early in the afternoon, the Ninth Corps had to give ground. The Prussian Guard had penetrated as far as Conantre. The position on Mont Août, and in the woods on the plain below it, was in danger. Before an attack by the Guard, covered by a tremendous artillery fire, these positions were abandoned. For awhile there was dangerous confusion. A spectator of the scene tells how he saw the French coming out of the woods, first by twos and threes, then in crowds—then a rush of cavalry, artillery wagons and guns, galloping back, under a hail of shrapnel and a burst of rifle fire from the margin of the woods. The line was re-established from Mont Chalmont across the railway in front of Linthes and

Pleurs, to keep touch with the retiring Eleventh Corps, whose left was now near Fresnay.

The line was dangerously weak on the plain by the railway. "The weaker one is, the more one should attack," Foch had said; and local counter-attacks held the enemy, who seemed exhausted by his efforts. And the progress southward of the Saxon advance had, if anything, made the "fissure" between Von Hausen's right and the left of the Guard more vulnerable. And at last Grosetti was near at hand.

Forming between the villages of Linthes and Linthelles, he led his division forward about four o'clock in the direction of Œuvy, the left towards the railway, the right towards the hollow of the Maurienne brook. This was the battering-ram blow striking in towards the flank and rear of the Saxons. But it was no isolated effort. The order had been sent along the lines by Foch to attack everywhere. The Eleventh Corps found the Saxons already retiring, and cleared the woods south of Gourgançon with little resistance. Grosetti captured Conantre and Corroy, and got into touch with the left of Eydoux's advance. The Ninth Corps regained a footing in the Mont Août woods. One of Grosetti's regiments went still forward after nightfall, halted well to the front of the woods, and in the dawn of the following day was into Fère Champenoise, which the enemy had evacuated in the night.

On the other flank, Humbert had been attacking about Mondement all through the day. The attack on the old château in particular was renewed again and again with reckless daring. It had become a point of honour to recapture it. It was like the desperate fighting that takes place to secure a standard or a gun. Mondement

had become something like a trophy of success or failure. Late in the evening, the French flag flew again from one of the turrets. Colonel Letoquoi had run three guns up close to the wall, breached it and stormed the gap thus made, not without the loss of many brave men.

On this side the Tenth Corps—men of northern Brittany and the Cherbourg peninsula, soldiers from Rennes, St. Brieuc and St. Malo—sent to Foch's help by D'Esperey, had advanced across the Petit Morin as far as Fromentières and were pressing towards Baye on the road from St. Prix northwards to Épernay. Thus the direct line of retreat for the Germans about Mondement was soon to be cut, and they had to retire by the roads across the marshes.

That evening Foch knew that he had won a great victory. Next day would show its full extent, and he must make the most of it. His orders, issued late on the Wednesday evening for the operations of Thursday, September 10th, directed that the offensive was to be resumed at 5 A.M.—just before sunrise. The Tenth Corps, now transferred to his command by D'Esperey, was to attack north of the marshes of St. Gond, in the direction of Bergères-lez-Vertus, against the enemy's northern line of retreat. The Ninth Army Corps was to advance between the east end of the marshes and the Fère Champenoise-Vitry railway, its objectives being Morains-le-Petit, Écury-le-Repos and Normée. The 42nd Division was to advance through Fère Champenoise. The Eleventh Corps was to push forward through Œuvy towards Lenharée. D'Espée's cavalry division was to protect the right of the advance and keep touch by patrols with the left of the Third Army, which was moving on Vitry-le-François.

Many of the popular narratives of the battle, published in the press soon after the event, stated that on September 9th Foch had been informed by his aviators that there was a gap between the left of Von Bülow's army and the right of Von Hausen's, and that his victorious manœuvre was a sudden thrust into this opening. But we have seen that the manœuvre which decided the victory was a much more difficult and delicate operation. Foch had divined the weak spot of the German front, and improvised a reserve, and used it to make the breach, which only came into existence next day, as the Guards corps on Von Bülow's left, and the Saxon corps on Von Hausen's right were forced on to divergent lines of retreat, with Foch's victorious army pushing in between them. It was not on September 9th, but on the 10th, that the aviator Brindejonc de Moulinais reported a gap in the German line with only some cavalry watching it.

The enemy had begun his retreat in the night; and the French advance on the left and centre met with opposition only from rearguards, that nowhere during the morning of the 10th made any prolonged or determined stand. At 5 A.M., the hour named for the advance to be resumed, a regiment of the 42nd Division, which had halted far to the front the night before, was marching into Fère Champenoise, where it found many wounded and stragglers of the Prussian Guard. The Guard had marched towards Vertus in the night, mostly by the good road from Fère Champenoise in the direction of Rheims. The detachments of the corps, which retired from Bannes, crossed the marsh road to Anizeux, a narrow metalled causeway, but a good hard track, even though some heavy rain fell in the night—

the first rain after long days of clear skies and torrid heat. Some stragglers may have been lost in the swamps and deep pools of the marshes of St. Gond; but there was no foundation for the legend, which, first spread through the French and Allied newspapers, was then repeated in more than one serious history of the war. It was a story of the Prussian Guard being driven into the desolate swamp, amid a deluge of rain that made the meadowlands impassable—of whole companies of men drowned in mud and water, and whole batteries of guns and convoys of wagons sunk to the axles and left to be collected by the victorious French. All wars have been fruitful in picturesque legends;—this was one of them.*

Towards midday the resistance of the German rearguards became more serious. Dubois had reoccupied Morains-le-Petit but north of it his advance was held. At St. Prix, at the other end of the marshes, the advance of the Tenth Corps found only an abandoned barricade at the bridge. North of the marshes there was a good deal of fighting, with rearguards steadily falling back towards Vertus and outflanked more than once by Humbert's Moroccans, when towards midday they crossed the roads of the marsh.

Grosetti, with the 42nd Division, was in action about 5.30 A.M. marching towards Lenharée. The Eleventh Corps was pressing forward on its right, and De l'Espée

* M. Charles le Goffic, in his work *Les Marais de St. Gond*, translated into English under the title of "General Foch at the Marne," deals very fully with the story, and shows how unfounded it was; and he justly remarks, "That which was swallowed up in the marshes, that which foundered desperately in their green depths, was more than a few crack battalions—it was the prestige of the German army and of its pretended invincibility . . . On this occasion, at least, the reality is finer than the legend."

reoccupied Mailly. The Saxons made a determined stand for some hours along the line of the Somme. At Sommesous, where Joppe's 60th Division was attacking, they held their ground all through the day. Further to the north, their batteries, massed along the margin of the woods beyond the river, put up a regular barrage along the railway line on the west bank. It was not till the afternoon that the French occupied Écury, Normée and Lenharée. They were now on the ground where the Eleventh Corps had fought in the first stage of the battle. The narratives of French officers, who took part in the advance, tell of the awful aspect of the battlefield. Round the villages, along the roads and the river banks and in the woods, lay thousands of dead, decomposing in the hot sun, where they had lain for days. It was as one soldier writes, "a Dantesque spectacle"; and more than one confesses that he felt ill in the sickly atmosphere amid those scenes of death in its most repulsive form.

On the left of the Somme line, about Sommesous, and to the east of it, the Saxons held their ground all day. They were making a desperate stand to cover the retirement of the rest of Von Hausen's army, which was now in a deep salient pointing south, with Foch on the one side, and De Langle de Cary's army on the other, threatening it with envelopment. At Vitry, De Langle's advance was held before formidable entrenchments, where a strong rearguard made a stand that secured the retreat.

Foch had established his headquarters at Fère Champenoise about midday. On the report that the line of the Somme had been won, he issued an order to press on towards the Soude; but the Saxon resistance in the

woods beyond the river prevented much progress being made, and towards evening Grosetti ordered a halt till daylight next morning. The order failed to reach Colonel Deville and the 162nd Regiment, in the woods in front of Lenharée. They moved forward under the impression that they still had other columns advancing on their left and right. By a curious chance, they had in front of them a gap in the enemy's line; and they passed through it without seeing anything of the Saxons. As darkness was coming on, they issued from the woods in the wide clearing near Villeseneux, only to come under a heavy fire from a mass of troops halted about the village and from machine guns on the church tower. They fell back towards Lenharée and bivouacked in the woods. When they advanced again next day, they found that Villeseneux had been abandoned by the enemy.

All along the line, the Saxon corps had withdrawn under cover of the darkness. Sommesous was occupied by the 60th Division at dawn on the 11th. A column of De l'Espée's troops was sent sweeping forward, seized two bridges on the Marne and in the course of the day occupied Châlons. Foch established his headquarters there that evening. His army had moved up to the river-line, and was crossing it at various points. The Tenth Corps was retransferred to D'Esperey's command.

The battle of the Marne was won. On the Allied right, the British were across the Ourcq, and the enemy was falling back to the Aisne. D'Esperey was close up to Rheims, Foch at Châlons, De Langle north of Vitry, Sarrail holding his own about Verdun. Beyond the eastern barrier line, De Castelnau on the 7th and 8th had defeated another advance of Prince Rupert's Bavarians, towards Nancy. The tide of invasion had been

turned back, and the long war of entrenched positions was about to begin.

Foch had captured a considerable number of prisoners and much miscellaneous débris of the enemy's retreat, including guns shattered by shell fire and left on the field. The enemy had lost heavily, but had made a good retreat. The Ninth Army, too, had suffered seriously, and paid dearly for its victory. There were regiments commanded by captains, companies under sergeants, so serious had been the loss among the officers. And when at last the pursuit of the enemy was suspended, along the Marne, about Châlons, officers and men alike were near the end of their strength. The long days of battle, without any reserves available to relieve the fighting line in its struggle with a heavier artillery and superior numbers, had been a terrible strain on all. "The men were nearly dead beat, but they marched all the same," said Foch, speaking of his army in the last phase of fight. The victory of September 9th had given them new energy, at the moment when, but for that stroke of genius of their chief, they might well have found themselves on the verge of disastrous collapse.

It was that day which made the name of Foch famous throughout the world. It has been indeed suggested that when he flung Grosetti's division against the weak point, the "fissure" he had marked in the enemy's line, the Germans were preparing to retreat, if the retreat had not already begun. Years hence, when the staff histories of both sides have been issued and made the necessary documents available, it will be possible to say when the German orders for retreat were given, when they reached corps, divisions and brigades, and when the movement actually began in front of the Ninth Army.

This much we do know—that in the morning of September 9th, French aviators flying high over the ground in the German rear, between Châlons-sur-Marne and Vertus, thought they saw the convoys of baggage wagons on the roads being rearranged, and their teams and motor-tractors turned so as to face northward—a sign that the staff was contemplating the necessity or the probability of an early retirement. But it is also fairly clear that hours later in the afternoon, the Guard was still attacking to the north of Fère Champenoise, and succeeded in driving the French from the woods near Mont Août, and Von Hausen's Saxons were pressing slowly but steadily forward, driving back Eydoux's Bretons south of the Gourgançon-Vitry road, and he had dug himself in about Vitry as if to secure a pivot for his advance. It would seem then that the hope of breaking down the resistance of Foch and piercing the French centre had not yet been abandoned, and it was the attack at the weak junction of the line between Von Bülow and Von Hausen that finally determined the retreat, while the same movement rendered the retreat, when it began, a perilous operation.

One may take it that both sides were in the position that frequently develops in the course of prolonged battle. Losses had been heavy, and the strain on the endurance of all was becoming each hour more severe. Both were nearing the breaking point. In such a situation the victory is for the side that can make one more determined effort. Foch's energy and insight produced this supreme effort at the critical moment and in the most decisive direction, and victory was the result. He deserves all the credit given to him for it, even if at the moment when his "battering ram" was driven into the

German line, the enemy's leaders were already losing heart, and preparing to abandon the hard-fought field.

The French Government therefore aptly characterized the service he had rendered to the Allied cause, when in bestowing upon him the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour in recognition of his leadership in the battle of the Marne, it summed up his exploits by saying:

"For several days he held back the violent attacks directed against our centre, and finally drove back the enemy to the northwards by a vigorous offensive, giving proof of calm determination and remarkable skill in manœuvre, sustained by energy and tenacity that rose superior to every difficulty."

CHAPTER XIII

FOCH AT YPRES

Foch had his headquarters at Châlons-sur-Marne on the evening of September 11th. He remained there for a little more than three weeks.

His first care was to reorganize the sorely tried Ninth Army, with the help of drafts sent from the depôts to replace its losses. For the time being, it was in reserve in the second line of the fighting front in Champagne—on which there was now little activity on either side. It was formed by the Fourth Army (De Langle de Cary) facing the Argonne, and the Fifth (D'Esperey) about Rheims.

The battle of the Aisne had begun on September 13th, and at first seemed to promise a new success for the Allies. But now the second phase of the war began to develop. The enemy had dug himself in solidly on the Aisne heights, where he was supported by masses of heavy artillery; and it was soon realized that frontal attacks against this improvised fortress could only end in costly failure.

Joffre now decided on turning the position by an advance up the Oise valley towards Noyon, so as to strike in behind the German flank. It was an obvious expedient, and the enemy was ready for it. De Castelnau was brought from the east of France, and with the Second Army came into action prolonging the line of

Maunoury's Sixth Army, which formed the Allied left. He found at once strong German forces barring his way. Then another army—the Tenth under General Maud'huy—was brought into line, prolonging the French front northwards across the Somme to the east of Amiens. Once more a German army was placed in position to bar the flank attack. As the French line lengthened northwards, the German extension kept pace with it. What the French official bulletin called the "*course à la Mer*" —the "race to the sea"—had begun.

Towards the end of September, it was clear that another dangerous crisis of the war was rapidly developing. German cavalry, supported by armed motor-cars and infantry detachments, were appearing on the Franco-Belgian border between Lille and Dunkirk; news through Holland told of continual transport of troops from east to west through Belgium; a German army was closing in upon Antwerp. It was evident that the enemy was preparing to besiege the famous fortress, clear his northern flank of the menace based upon it, and then pour a new tide of invasion into northern France, turning the extended battle line of the Allies before it could rest securely upon the sea.

An ambitious plan was formed by Joffre and the British command to save Antwerp by a counter-stroke against the German right. The danger to the fortress and the Belgian army was now imminent. On Sunday, September 27th, General Von Beseler, who had been given command of the operations against Antwerp, attacked along the Scheldt about Termonde, the beginning of an unsuccessful effort to cut the Belgian line of retreat. Next day, his siege guns, reinforced by heavy Skoda howitzers manned by Austrian gunners, opened

fire on the southern forts of Antwerp at a range of seven miles.

A movement of the British army—carefully and successfully concealed—was begun in order to transfer it from the Aisne front to Abbeville by rail. Thence it was to advance into Belgium, clearing the French border district of the enemy, saving Lille from a threatened hostile occupation, and then pushing forward to relieve Antwerp, with the co-operation of French troops.

Up to the closing period of the battle for the Aisne heights, the main Allied front had run from west to east along the Aisne, and across southern Champagne to Verdun. A secondary front ran from Verdun along the eastern fortress barrier to the Swiss border near Belfort. A third front at right angles to the Aisne line was now coming into existence, stretching from south to north, from Compiegne to the Belgian frontier, and soon to be prolonged to the sea. Here French, British and Belgian troops would be in position on various points of this new line of over a hundred miles of frontage. Joffre decided that the operations on this important front should be placed under one general control.

It was a wise decision. Co-operation had to be secured between three different national armies. Plans of action, arranged to meet the new developments of the German attack, and necessarily varied as occasion arose, would be handicapped in the important element of time if they were to be the subject of correspondence, even by telegraph, between the headquarters of the French armies on the front, the French General Headquarters, the British headquarters and King Albert's staff. There must be one man with the power to decide

and advise on the spot—a man who could keep in close touch with the local headquarters of the armies, study the situation on the spot and watch at close quarters its varying phases. It would be a delicate task, for there could as yet be no question of a single command. The soldier sent to the new front could act as commander-in-chief of the French armies there and issue orders to them; but he could only offer advice to King Albert and Sir John French, advice to be given tactfully, and perhaps to be the subject of negotiation. Difficult problems would have to be rapidly solved; and the situation was a dangerous one. The post would have to be offered to a soldier who could face with calm resolution and resourceful expedients even the menace of disaster.

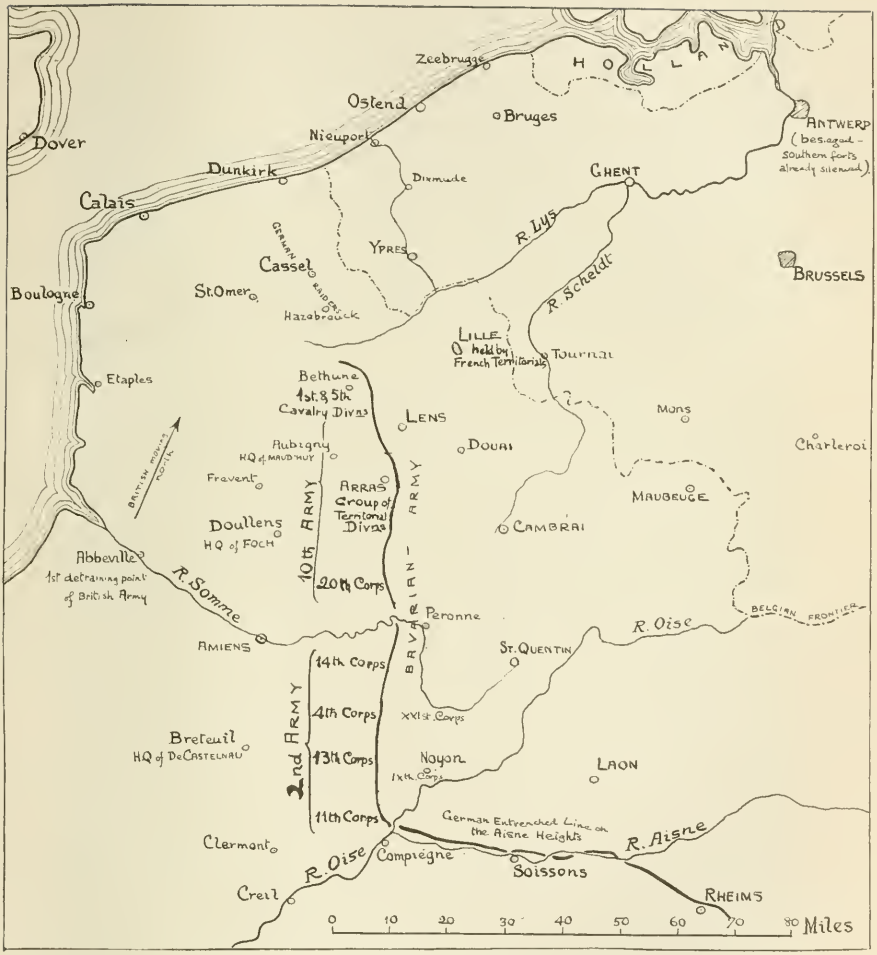
Once more Joffre showed his capacity for making a wise choice of his subordinate commanders. The first days of October had brought the news, that the southern forts of Antwerp were being crushed by the Austro-German artillery. On Saturday, the 3rd, the movement of the British army from the Aisne front had just begun. In the north of France, German cavalry patrols were about Cassel and Hazebrouck. The crisis was developing with dangerous rapidity. The Belgian staff had actually decided to abandon the defence of Antwerp. The Government was already being transferred from the city to Havre.

On Sunday, October 4th, Mr. Winston Churchill arrived at Antwerp with a promise that British succour was on the way; and King Albert was persuaded to prolong the defence. The same afternoon, General Foch at Châlons-sur-Marne received a telegram from Joffre telling him to hand over the command of what was left of the Ninth Army to his next in seniority, and start

immediately for the north of France, where he was to take over the command of the French troops already holding the new line or moving towards it. These were the armies of De Castelnau and Maud'huy, a group of Territorial Divisions under General Brugere, and the Cavalry Divisions of Generals De Mitry and Conneau. His official title was to be "*adjoint au général commandant en chef*"—"assistant to the commander-in-chief."

The Ninth Army was already being broken up, a sign that Foch would be employed elsewhere before long. A few days before he received Joffre's message, the Eleventh Army Corps (Eydoux) had been sent away to reinforce De Castelnau. The rest of the army was soon to be dispersed, some of its divisions being transferred to Foch's new sphere of command. It was late when he received the telegram, but it did not take long to hand over the headquarters business of Châlons to a temporary successor. In the evening he had started on his journey, travelling westward in a motor-car, and taking with him his chief of the staff in the Ninth Army, Colonel (now General) Weygand, who has since been his right-hand man in successive commands.

The route of the car was across the bend of the Marne, over the northern margin of the battlefield of September, and over Napoleon's battlefields of Champaubert and Montmirail, then across the Marne at Meaux by the bridge hastily repaired after being blown up in the great retreat: then northwestward through the darkness through the woods by Senlis, with the thud of heavy gun fire sounding miles away, from the Aisne heights on the right. Over the Oise at Creil went the car, and then northwards through Clermont and into



Situation on the 'Northern Front' when Foch took command.

the main street of the little town of Breteuil. It was 4 A.M. on a moonless autumn night.

General de Castelnau did not expect his early visitor, and was in bed, fast asleep. He rose and dressed, coffee was made, and the two soldier friends discussed the situation. Foch had come, to learn from the men on the spot how matters stood, and what troops were available, and where. A few weeks ago, Foch had been under De Castelnau's command. Now the positions were reversed. But neither of them could have any personal feeling of the change. They were working together, each giving his best.

The conference lasted nearly two hours. At six o'clock, while it was still dark, Foch was in his car again. Further northwards he went, through Amiens in the early twilight; then, at the great junction of roads at Doullens, there was a turn to the northeastward, and at nine o'clock the General was at the village of Aubigny near Arras, the headquarters of Maud'huy's Tenth Army. Here there was another prolonged conference. Foch received from Maud'huy detailed reports of the German movements further north, and of their increasing activity in front of Arras which now was near the extreme left of the growing French line. De Mitry and Conneau's cavalry were guarding the flank. Brugère's territorial troops were covering Arras. Further south, Maud'huy's line was held by Foch's old army corps, the 20th, lately brought from the Eastern Front; and here again, as at Morhange and the Trouée de Charmes, the Bavarian army was opposed to them.

Having collected all the information he required, and got into personal touch with the army commanders, Foch established his headquarters at Doullens, a place

that had good railway communications and stood at the centre of a radiating junction of roads. Here three days later, on October 8th, Sir John French, on his way from the Aisne front to the north, came to confer with him.

The situation had not improved. The outer forts on the southern front of Antwerp had fallen; the line of defence on the Nethe had been lost. The German shrapnel was bursting over the city, while the Belgian army was beginning its retreat across the floating bridge on the Scheldt, and the inhabitants were in flight by the roads into Holland, and in crowded craft of all kinds on the river. The German advanced troops were on a wide front in French Flanders; and reinforcements, soon to be augmented by the besiegers of Antwerp, were moving forward to convert the raid into an invasion. A British division under Rawlinson, and a cavalry force had been landed at Ostend and Zeebrugge. The Second Corps of the British Expeditionary Force, transferred from the Aisne, had begun detraining at Abbeville and marching towards the frontier. The Third Corps had not yet arrived; it was to retrain at St. Omer. The First Corps would arrive still later. The Belgian army would now be in retreat along the coast. Would the British army be in time to close the gap between it and the French line and stop the German inroad?

Foch and French had become friends two years before, during the British army manœuvres near Cambridge, and had met on two or three occasions since then. There would be no difficulty about a free exchange of views between them; and Foch gave ready approval to the British commander's plans, and promised hearty co-operation on the part of his own troops.

Sir John (in his despatch of November 20th, 1914) sets forth in detail the plan that was adopted. It may be thus summarized. The British Second Corps (Smith-Dorrien) would be on the front Aire-Bethune by October 11th. It was to connect with the right of Maud'huy's Tenth Army, now extending north of Arras, and endeavour to act against the left of the German force opposed to it. The Third and First corps would come into action in succession, in the same way, on the left of the second. Sir Henry Rawlinson's force in Belgium would assist the retirement of the Antwerp garrison, and co-operate as soon as possible with the general British and French advance. French was hopeful of great results, for his memorandum on the plan ends thus:

"In the event of those movements so far overcoming the resistance of the enemy as to enable a forward movement to be made, all the Allies to march in an easterly direction. The road running from Bethune to Lille was to be the dividing line between the British and French forces, the right of the British being directed on Lille."

But the force that the enemy was concentrating in Belgium was underrated, and the time available overestimated. Antwerp was in the enemy's hands on October 9th. The British advance towards Lille began only on the 12th. Next day that city was captured by the enemy. All that could be accomplished—and under the circumstances it was a most valuable result—was to push back the German advanced troops from the French border, follow them up towards the Yser and occupy Ypres and the Yser and the Lys lines, closing the gap between the Belgian army and the French left.

Foch assisted, by pushing in to the help of the Belgians a force under General D'Urbal, which gradually grew into the French Eighth Army. On October 20th, the line was complete from the sea to the Oise, though on the Yser front it was very thinly held. And the German forces in front were increasing day by day. On the 21st the first battle of Ypres, known in France as the battle of the Yser, began.

The battle lasted till the middle of November. The weak Allied line—at one time held for miles only by a small force of dismounted cavalry—stood firm against repeated assaults of superior numbers, assaults driven home with a reckless courage that was only surpassed by the stubborn valour of the defence. Here and there the line was forced back; at times it seemed on the point of breaking, but it held, though at a terrible cost.

In England at the time it was not unnaturally spoken of as a "British" victory. Every nation concentrates its attention and its anxieties on its own men. But it was a victory of the Allies. On the left, near the sea, the Belgians held fast, aided by two naval supports, the British ships on the seaward flank bringing their guns to bear on the German right, the French naval division of Breton and Norman sailors under Admiral Ron'arch helping to hold the Dixmude front. Next in the line came D'Urbal's Eighth Army. The rest of the front, held at first by British troops who were soon reinforced by the Indian corps, was finally made good by the help of French contingents. Here for the first time in the war French and British fought, not as allied armies side by side, but mingled together in closer comradeship, brigades and divisions forming at last a parti-coloured line

of khaki and blue, and the men of the two nations often fighting side by side, shoulder to shoulder, in the same shallow trench.

It was Foch who supplied this invaluable support to the hard-pressed British line. The battle had hardly begun, when, on October 24th, he transferred his headquarters from Doullens to Cassel, the little perch on an isolated hill top that looks out over the Flanders flats like a watch tower, commanding on fine days a view from the sea to the Yser.

The headquarters offices were at the old Town Hall. The general lived close by, at the house of a local notary. When he was not at the fighting front, he spent most of the day in his room at the Hotel de Ville, the map before him, the telephone beside him. It was often long after midnight when he returned to the notary's house for a few hours' sleep. A short ride or a walk gave him exercise. No soldier in his high command ever lived with less of ceremony surrounding his headquarters. The motor-car was used only for rapid rushes to the front. He walked about the little town of Cassel, unattended even by an orderly. The war correspondent of a London paper one day gave a characteristic glimpse of the general's ways. He had followed him on the chance of having a few words with him at headquarters. Foch turned aside to enter a church. The journalist went in, and saw the general kneeling on the pavement with clasped hands and down-bent head.

Another well-known war correspondent, Mr. G. H. Perris, tells of a visit with some of his colleagues of the press to the headquarters of General Foch, towards the end of the Ypres battle. It is worth reproducing, as an impression of the commander and his surroundings.

The "curious little town," which could not be named when Mr. Perris wrote, was of course Cassel.

"In a certain curious little town, which must not be named, we suddenly learned by the fact that he invited us to meet him, that we were in the midst of the État Major of the Commander-in-Chief of the four northern armies, General Foch. The general of to-day does not go about the battlefields on a prancing charger. He sits still in an obscure house, working out the plans of the war, as though it were a particularly long, hard and momentous game of chess. There was no sign whatever to mark this house out from its terrace neighbours; and within there was no sign of pomp or comfort. A short quick-moving clear-glanced man stepped out of an inner room—the engineer's office of the northern campaign—and stood for three or four minutes in our midst. After greetings, he uttered a sharp speech of about a hundred words, noting the critical character of the twenty-days' battle, the endurance and gallantry of the men and the greatness of the issue. I had been reading Ségur, and could not but contrast the new method with the theatrical comings and goings of the greatest of soldiers. General Foch is responsible for a host greater than any Napoleon led, with the possible exception of the disastrous Russian expedition. But no Napoleonic legend will gather round his person or memory; and to say this is not to shadow a distinguished name, but simply to record our passage into a new phase in the development of the world." *

With the last days of October there came a dangerous crisis on the Ypres front. On October 29th, the thin line that held the salient was hard pressed. Ground was lost, and won back again by costly counter-attacks, the German artillery fire was heavier from hour to

* *The Campaign of 1914 in France and Belgium*, by G. H. Perris, p. 359.

hour, and fresh divisions were massing to reinforce the attack.

Foch had spent the day at Cassel. As the reports of the situation about Ypres arrived in the evening, he remained late at the Town Hall. He realized that the position must be even more serious next day. He collected all the necessary information as to what French units he could dispose of from other parts of his long line, and sent off orders for their immediate movement northwards. Then, just after midnight, he sent for his motor-car, and taking with him one of his staff officers, Captain Meunier Surcouf, he started for St. Omer, the headquarters of Sir John French.

The fifteen miles to St. Omer were soon covered. All the while the thunder of the German guns to the eastward gave warning of serious work next day. At 1 A.M. Foch was with the British commander-in-chief. Both agreed that the British line at Ypres was being strained dangerously near to the breaking point. Foch asked Sir John what reserve he had available, and the reply was that practically everything had been put into line.

"Well," said Foch, "I can give you some of mine. General Joffre is sending me eight battalions of the 32nd Division. Take them, and *en avant!*"

Meunier Surcouf, who was present, tells how Sir John French rose and grasped Foch's hand, as he said "Thanks!—you are giving me splendid help."

Then the two commanders set to work together to arrange the details of this welcome reinforcement. By 2 A.M., the order had been wired to all concerned; and Foch returned to Cassel. Before daylight, the first of the eight battalions were detraining behind the Ypres line and marching to the front.

That day, Saturday, October 31st, brought the crisis of the battle. There was a fierce drive of the attack against the salient of the Ypres line. Gheluvelt village was taken. North of the place, the line was driven in, the 1st Coldstream Guards being badly cut up. South of Gheluvelt, the 7th Division, with its flank exposed, had to fall back. Here the Scots Fusiliers were cut off and all but annihilated. Of the battalion only an officer and seventy men were left. Hooge, where the headquarters of the First Corps was established, came under a storm of shell fire; two generals and several of the staff were hit. North of the Menin-Ypres road, the situation was temporarily saved by a counter-attack, directed by General FitzClarence. South of Hooge, the line was steadied and a dangerous gap filled by De Moussy bringing up some of the battalions of reserve supplied by Foch. Here it was that a break in the front was closed and the German rush stopped by a charge led by De Moussy in person at the head of a scratch force made up of his escort, some men of the British Army Service Corps, and a number of stragglers, servants, cooks, every man that could be hastily collected, some of them without weapons.

Further to the right, on the long rise of ground known as the Messines Ridge, the enemy took Wytschaete, and was pressing into the burning streets of Messines, threatening to turn the whole main position before Ypres.

Sir John French, in his despatch, notes that the hour from two to three in the afternoon was the most critical moment of the prolonged battle for Ypres. He was then, with Sir Douglas Haig, under shell fire, in Hooge village. As soon as the enemy's pressure showed some sign of slackening, and the Germans were being pressed

back towards Gheluvelt, French left Hooge and drove back through Ypres. Then by a happy chance he met Foch again. Foch had come over from Cassel in the morning, to see for himself how the battle was going. In the afternoon he had a consultation with General D'Urbal, the commander of the Eighth Army, at Vlamertinghe near Ypres. While the two generals were together, Major Jamet of the French staff, who was at the door of the house, saw Sir John French's car coming down the village street, and called out to him to stop. French was pleased to hear that Foch was there, and came in to talk with him. There was a brief exchange of views. The situation was a serious one. It must have reminded Foch of the anxious days before the tide of war turned, during his own fight by the marshes of St. Gond. But now, as then, there could be no question of giving way. Foch promised further help to the hard-pressed British line. The Belgian front, now protected to a great extent by inundations, was strong enough for some of the French troops to be spared from that part of the line. Foch had ordered the withdrawal of Grosetti's 42nd Division—his battering ram on the critical day of the Marne—and it would be available next day on the Ypres front. It would relieve Allenby's thin line of dismounted cavalry on the right of the position. The two commanders drafted their joint orders for the next day. One of Foch's orders required some movement of British troops for its execution. He showed it to French, who simply added the words, " Carry out the orders of General Foch," and signed it. There was not yet for a long time to be unity of command; but there was the most perfect comradeship, mutual understanding, and hearty co-operation.

On November 1st, the line was re-established, and the German onset slackened. Then for some days there was little more than a cannonade along the opposing fronts. On November 10th, the battle blazed up again, and the Prussian Guard attacked the British front, only to fail disastrously. In the following week, the fighting became less serious day by day. The first battle of Ypres was coming to an end. By the 17th it was over. The German effort to break the line, turn the Allied front and push on to the Channel ports, had failed, and failed thanks to the stubborn resistance of Sir John French's army and the loyal comradeship and well-directed co-operation of General Foch.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES

DURING the winter of 1914-15, Foch kept his headquarters at Cassel—his hill top lookout over the Flemish flats. A great crisis of the war had passed, a time of exceeding peril for the Allied cause; and Foch had borne a leading part in averting disaster. How great was the peril was only realized at the time by those who had to grapple with it. As one of the historians of the war has well said, the people both in France and England knew little of it. "The French official communiqués gave the barest information, and the Paris papers could not supplement. The English press continued to publish reassuring articles and victorious headlines; indeed, we were officially told that our front had everywhere advanced on a day when it had everywhere fallen back. Hence since the duration of the crisis had caused little anxiety, its end brought no special relief or rejoicing to the ordinary man. Soldiers, returning on leave, solemnized by their desperate experience, were amazed at the perfect calmness of the British public, until they discovered that it was caused by a perfect ignorance." *

One result of this official reticence, and the consequent lack of public knowledge of what was happening during the crisis at Ypres, was that the immense service Foch had rendered to the Allied cause was almost un-

* *History of the War*, by Colonel John Buchan, vol. V., p. 10.

known and certainly was not properly appreciated. There was in England a general knowledge of the fact that the French troops had given timely help, but few heard of the man whose keen intellect had directed that co-operation and given again wise counsel and welcome encouragement to his British comrades in command. Nor was it known till months later that these services did not end with the November day, when the last fierce German attack broke on the lines at Ypres, and fell back in defeat. The British divisions were so exhausted with the long struggle, so thinned with losses that ran up to tens of thousands, that it was essential that most of the troops should be withdrawn to rest the men and reorganize the various units. By the end of November, 1914, only the Third British Army Corps, the new 8th Division, some of the cavalry and the Indian corps were in the front line. From the Lys flats to the sea the ground was mostly held by Foch's French troops.

Along this northern front the wintry weather came early. It was not—so far as temperature went—a particularly hard winter. If it had been, the conditions might have been more easily endured, and active operations might have been more possible. Hard dry cold, without exceptionally heavy snow, makes every bit of open ground as good as a road, keeps the roads themselves in excellent order, and is not unhealthy weather for well-clad and well-fed troops. But this winter of 1914-15 was a time of cold rain in abundance, that turned the Flemish flats into a swamp. There was some snow, and for weeks there was frost every night, generally followed by a thaw in the day-time. The Lys was in places more than half a mile wide. In the trenches there was a continual struggle to prevent whole

fronts being flooded out. Men passed weary nights up to their knees in half-frozen water. All but the great main roads became quagmires. Though fighting on any large scale gradually became impossible and there was a lull in the main operations, that Flanders winter was a most trying time for both sides.

The opposing armies were now chiefly engaged in digging themselves in, and improving their positions. The trenches hastily dug in the autumn were developing into elaborate fortified systems, which were to be held for years with little change in the fronts. There was much strange talk of a new "war of attrition." The German enemy was to be besieged and forced to surrender by a process of exhaustion. Optimists predicted the date of collapse as not many months off. It was one of the many delusions of the war. Foch, with his theory that wars are decided by the shock of battle, the decisive blow, was not likely to share it; and with his bed-rock principle that attack is the best form of defence, he organized active operations against the German lines as soon as he had reorganized his own long front.

Though there was a lull in the fighting (so far as great battles were involved) during the bad weather, it blazed up, now here now there, in the worst of the winter months. In the last days of November, there was hard fighting on the front held by the Indian troops, which was suddenly attacked by the enemy. Further north, at the beginning of December, the French improved their position on the Yser by a vigorous counter-attack. Foch had by this time information that the enemy were transferring large bodies of troops from the Western Front, to strengthen Hindenburg's armies in the East. It was important to check this eastward

flow of reinforcements by a show of activity on the Western Front; and Foch chose as the scene of renewed operations one of the critical points of the enemy's line. This minor operation of December, 1914, had a marked influence on much that followed. The attack thus opened was renewed and enlarged in its scope from time to time; so that it proved to be the prelude to important events of a later stage in the campaign.

A line of high ground—known to French geographers as the "Hills of Artois"—begins at Cape Gris Nez, near Calais, and runs southeastward, forming the watershed between the rivers and streams that flow to the flats of Flanders and those of the Seine basin in France. The hills are nowhere of any considerable height; often they are long slopes like those of the English chalk downs, with flat rounded tops. Their greatest heights seem important only by contrast with the wide stretches of flat country they overlook, to the northward. North of Arras this line of high ground forms the dominant Vimy Ridge (famous in the record of the Canadian army), and close by is the narrow ridge of Notre Dame de Lorette. On the slopes that descend northward from these heights, and among the flat-topped low spurs that run out from them, stands Lens, the great colliery centre of northern France, with its pitheads, shale heaps, and a network of railway lines. Outlying colliery centres are about Loos, Grenay, and other mining villages. The Germans held Lens and the whole of its colliery region, and had converted the place into an improvised fortress. They held also the Vimy and Loretto ridges in dangerous proximity to Arras and had constructed a network of entrenchments north of Arras, among the southern spurs of the ridges and covering the

gap where the little Souchez brook runs down to Lens between the Vimy and Lorette heights. The whole of these strong positions formed a salient in the German front, a menacing salient not only for Arras but for the country towards Bethune. It had almost a defensive value for the enemy. It not only secured their possession of the coal-field and of the useful railway system that centred on Lens, but it also formed a barrier against attempt of the Allies to advance into the low lands of the upper Scarpe and Scheldt.

Later on, Foch was to plan a formidable offensive against these positions; but the time was not ripe, nor were the forces available for anything like an effort to break through the German line. But Foch had already marked this region as the possible objective of serious operations in the future, and he made the minor operation he now directed a preparation for such an undertaking.

As his immediate objective he chose a strong point in the enemy's front—one of his advanced posts. This was the Château of Vermelles and the entrenched ground about it. The château was stormed by Maud'huy's troops in the first days of December after a hard fight. They held it against a counter-attack, and pushing on, captured and entrenched themselves in the village of Rutoire. In itself it was a small gain; but the seizure of Vermelles deprived the enemy of the use of a railway-line directly linking up their positions about La Bassée with those on the Lorette spur. And there was the further gain that this success was inspiriting to the whole army on the northern front. They had shown they could hold the German attacks. But they had now taken the offensive against the enemy's entrenched

lines, and won a position from him by sheer hard fighting, hand to hand. It was a presage of greater things.

Later in the month a combined operation of British and French troops was arranged to recapture part of the Ridge of Messines, south of Ypres. Some ground was won, but the German resistance here proved more serious than had been anticipated. Then there was a prolonged pause in the fighting on the northern front; but as the weather improved in the New Year, Foch resumed his activity against the German front toward Lens. Preparations were made for aggressive trench warfare, based on siege work lines, against the German positions along the Souchez brook, and the network of trenches, "machine-gun nests," and other improvised fortifications,- that extended along the Arras road, with their citadel in the huge knot of entrenchments known to the French as "the Labyrinth."

While these preparations were in progress, during the month of April, heavy fighting had begun on the Ypres front. On April 22nd, a new horror was introduced into war by the German gas attack on the north-east of the Ypres salient. The line on the left, held by the French, had to give way, and the Germans crossed the canal, north of Ypres. A wide breach, thinly held, had been opened in the Allied line. On the morning of the 23rd, Foch met Sir John French. In his despatch, the British commander tells how he pointed out that it might be necessary to abandon a good deal of ground in order to shorten the British line, the left flank of which was so dangerously exposed. Foch asked him to hold out for awhile, saying he hoped to regain the ground lost on the left, and re-establish the position, and that he

was bringing up large French reinforcements, some of which had already arrived.

"I fully concurred," writes Sir John French, "in the wisdom of the General's wish to re-establish our old line, and agreed to co-operate in the way he desired, stipulating however, that if the position was not re-established within a limited time, I could not allow the British troops to remain in so exposed a situation, as that which the action of the previous twenty-four hours had compelled them to occupy."

Foch succeeded in driving the Germans back across the Yser Canal, but was unable to regain much of the ground beyond it. The Allies were handicapped by having to fight exposed to the horrible gas attack, in those first days, when they had not yet learned to guard against it. It was no fault of the French that they failed to regain the lost front; and in a few days Foch agreed that it was necessary to draw the whole line of the salient closer in to Ypres. In the first days of May, the position was again secure, and he felt himself free to devote his attention to the offensive he had organized.

He now left Cassel, and moved his headquarters to the village of Frevént, north of Doullens, and on the railway and road from Arras to Etaples. Here he was within easy reach of the front to be attacked.

It is interesting to note that by this time General Joffre had grouped the French armies into three commands; and these three groups of armies had for their commanders the three generals who had played the leading part in the operations in the east of France in August, 1914, that culminated in the victory of the Trouée de Charmes. The "northern front" from

Compiègne to the sea was commanded by Foch: the central front, from Compiègne to Verdun by De Castelnau: and the eastern front, from Verdun to the Belfort Gap and the Swiss frontier, by Dubail.

Foch had brought up, in all, eleven hundred guns to the front he was about to attack. The artillery preparation was to be on a greater scale than anything yet attempted by the Allies. For once, the Germans were out-gunned, and Foch had made a local concentration of infantry that probably also secured that they were out-numbered. Their only local advantage was the exceeding strength of their positions.

We have followed in detail the earlier operations of the war—the Battles of Morhange and the Trouée de Charmes, and the fighting in the French centre at the great Battle of the Marne. This has been done to show how Foch won his way to high command, and how he applied in the field the principles he had taught at the École de Guerre and in his writings. His co-operation with the British command in the arduous days of the first Battle of Ypres has also been described in detail. There he laid the foundation for his future close *camcraderie* with the British generals, and establish those relations of mutual friendship and trust, that made his final appointment to the command-in-chief of the Allied armies as welcome to British, Irish, and Oversea soldiers of the Dominions, as it was to the French themselves. Henceforth we need only touch upon the salient points of the operations he directed.

On Sunday, May 9th, Foch opened fire from his thousand guns. More than 300,000 shells were fired that day, more than half of them in the early hours of the morning. The bombardment simply swept the first

German line of works out of existence. At ten, the infantry attack began. By noon, on the right the French were across the Arras road and fighting their way into the villa of Neuville St. Vaast. In the centre—the point of the German salient—the line of chalk-cut trenches, known as the "White Works," was stormed, and the attack pushed on for over two miles. On the left of this line the Germans were clinging to Carency and the broken ground around it, fighting from house to house in the village. By nightfall, Foch had three thousand prisoners and ten captured guns as trophies of success. Then the fighting went on day by day, and the French steadily won more and more ground. On the 12th, the commanding ridge of Notre Dame de Lorette was stormed.

Despite desperate resistance, the attack pushed forward, clearing village after village, fighting its way into the formidable works of "the Labyrinth." By the end of May, the German salient had been flattened in, the menace to Arras from the north had been destroyed, and, although the enemy still held the Vimy Ridge, the capture of the hill of Notre Dame de Lorette had deprived the Germans of a dominating position and opened the way for a further advance. Best of all, the hard-won success had increased the confidence of the French soldier in himself and his chiefs. It was no longer defensive war, but the attack; and the result had shown that, with adequate artillery preparation, the strongest entrenched line could be broken into. The Allies were successfully adapting themselves to the new conditions of trench warfare, and developing the tactical methods it required.

Fighting went on through the summer on the new

front won in May—siege warfare in trenches cut through Souchez village, in houses levelled nearly to the ground but with their ruins and their cellars turned into improvised forts. But no operations on a large scale were attempted until September.

The Allied man power was growing, but there was still a deficiency of heavy artillery; and the supply of munitions, large as it was in comparison with anything that had been required in earlier wars, had not yet risen to the enormous amount needed for a continuous bombardment on the scale of that which had heralded Foch's attack near Arras. The Allied chiefs had decided upon a combined offensive towards the end of the summer. To accumulate munitions for it, and add largely to the available gun power, was the work of the summer. The great offensive, for which a decisive result was hoped, was fixed for September, 1915.

The main attack was to be delivered by De Castelnau's group of armies on the Champagne front. Foch was to play an important but still a subsidiary part in the plan of the offensive. To keep the German armies on the northern front occupied, besides minor attacks at other points there was to be an attack in force on the part of their line covering Lens. Apart from the diversion that would be thus made in favour of the main attack in Champagne, this secondary attack in Artois might give very important results.

By this time the British Territorial army, and the new Kitchener armies, had sent several divisions to France; and Foch had been able to arrange for an extension of the front held by Sir John French's troops. The British line was extended southward as far as Grenay, on the edge of the Lens coal-field and just

north of the Notre Dame de Lorette Ridge. The attack from the northern front was to be made where the British and French lines joined. Two of the British armies would attack towards Loos, while D'Urbal's Tenth French Army would push forward against the Souchez Gap and the German front as far as the Vimy Ridge. The battle was to begin on September 25th.

Every precaution was taken to keep the secret of the Allied plans. But nevertheless the Germans had a very sufficient warning of what was coming. Foch had laid it down in his lectures at the École de Guerre, that surprise should if possible be an element in any decisive attack, and had suggested that on this account the burst of artillery fire that prepared the way for the attack on the battlefield should not last long. When he launched his own attack, in May, 1915, he had kept his thousand guns in action for a few hours only, before his infantry "went over the top". But the September offensive was preluded and prepared by a gigantic bombardment from a huge concentration of artillery in both Champagne and Artois, that went on for a fortnight. It was heard far to the German rear, away on the Belgian frontier. Day and night, often at this distance there was in the air a continuous sound like the rumbling of a distant thunder storm. The enemy set to work to strengthen his second and third lines; and when at last the attack was launched, on September 25th, though the first line had mostly been destroyed, all was ready further back for a well-organized resistance.

In severe fighting prolonged over several days, the Allies gained some ground, but the general result was disappointing. On the front which Foch had attacked with the Tenth Army, there could be no question of sur-

prise, for here fighting had been going on ever since May; there would be a lull for some days, and then it would blaze up again into a fierce struggle at close quarters. The fronts were, in places, only a few yards apart. In Souchez village ruined houses and street corners were lost and won, and lost again.

But on September 25th, new forces were thrown into the attack, Souchez was stormed, and in the days that followed the whole line was pushed forward a little, and a footing gained on the western end of the Vimy Ridge. Then the advance came to a standstill, for behind these first positions the enemy had dug himself in, and formed a new labyrinth of deeply-entrenched works, that had been untouched by the bombardment. Desultory fighting followed for a time; and then with the hard winter weather, the fronts settled down into a deadlock, and it seemed to many that it was likely to be almost permanent. So far all attacks on either side had had much the same result. It was evident now that by a concentration of artillery fire for the preparation, followed up by an infantry attack, some ground could always be won in the enemy's advanced positions; but the problem of breaking the line was still unsolved. This much was clear, that the way to its solution lay in the accumulation of munitions, guns and reserves of men, so as to be able to push forward after the first onset had exhausted its force; then to renew the artillery preparation against the positions that had been reached, and make a second advance. The next great effort would be, not a single offensive, but a continuous series, lasting week after week, month after month. This was to be prepared for the summer of 1916.

CHAPTER XV

BATTLE OF THE SOMME

On the Western Front the campaign of 1916 opened with the German offensive against Verdun. The attack began towards the end of February. By the middle of March the pressure of the fortress was severe, and General Joffre had no easy task to find fresh troops to hold the lines of the long battle front on both banks of the Meuse. Foch therefore withdrew the Tenth Army from the ground on which it had fought so long to the north of Arras; and British troops took over that part of the front. A little later the British line was extended still further south to the Somme near Albert. Sir Douglas Haig, who now commanded the British Expeditionary Force, was thus able to contribute to the saving of Verdun by setting free considerable reinforcements from the part of the northern front that had been so long held by Foch's troops.

In the spring, Foch himself had a narrow escape from death or permanent disablement. It was not among the perils of battle that the moment of danger came, but during a motor drive on a good road where everything seemed safe. He had attended a conference at the headquarters of the central armies, and was driving back from it by the main road on the north bank of the Marne, near Meaux. Suddenly a woman with a child in her arms, not noticing the near approach of the car, stepped out to cross the road in front of it.

The chauffeur, to avoid running over her, put on the brake sharply, and pushed round the steering wheel. The car skidded and crashed into one of the roadside trees. Foch was hurt about the head, happily not very seriously, but seriously enough to have to be taken to the hospital at Meaux, where he was under the anxious care of the doctors for some days. He was visited there by President Poincaré, the Prime Minister, M. Briand and General Joffre. It is a tribute to the position he held in the eyes of the army and the French people, that it was considered advisable to suppress all news of his accident. The danger of such a chief being lost to the French armies would have caused widespread depression and anxiety, if it had been known.*

Foch made a rapid recovery, and before the middle of June he was working with Sir Douglas Haig at the final arrangements for the coming offensive on the Somme, the most important operation yet undertaken by the Allies on the Western Front. Both in France and England, writers of some authority on the Battle of the Somme have described Foch as being in command of the whole operation of the Allied Armies. This was

* It would not have been mentioned here, only that there is evidence that the veto of the censorship has been removed. The incident is referred to in a recently published work by a writer of well-deserved reputation, Miss Mildred Aldrich. In her book, *On the Edge of the War Zone* (p. 179) writing on May 23rd at Huiry near Meaux, she says: "There is nothing new here except that General Foch is in the ambulance at Meaux. No one knows it; not a word has appeared in the newspapers. It was the result of a stupid but unavoidable automobile accident. . . . Luckily he was not seriously hurt, though his head got damaged. On Thursday, Poincaré passes over our hill, with Briand, *en route* to meet Joffre at the General's bedside. I did not see them, but some of the people at Quincy did. It was a lucky escape for Foch. He would have hated to die during this war of a simple, unmilitary automobile accident, and the army could ill afford, just now to lose one of the heroes of the war. Carefully as the fact has been concealed, we knew it through our ambulance, which is a branch of that at Meaux where he is being nursed."

not so. Unity of command was still nearly two years away in the future. Foch and Haig co-operated, as Eugene and Marlborough worked together in the campaign of Blenheim, and Wellington and Blücher in that of Waterloo. Foch's position was that of commander of the French troops on "the northern front," with the mission also to keep in the closest touch with the British Headquarters and do all that was necessary to co-ordinate the operations of the two armies. His knowledge of war, his record and his character, gave him a special authority, not of the mere official type, with the British commanders. With Sir Douglas Haig he was always in the most friendly relations. How far the general plan of the battle was due to Foch's initiative cannot yet be determined, but the whole scheme was the result of consultation between the French and British staffs.

The attack was to be made on a front of twenty-five miles, the British on the left (north), the French on the right (south). The point where the two armies were in touch was near the village of Maricourt, north of the bend of the Somme. The French left here was separated from the rest of Foch's line by the wide swampy hollow through which the Somme flows east and west. This long reach of marsh and stream ends eastward at the sharp bend, where Peronne, with its mediæval castle and its old rampart line, stands amid an expanse of swamps and backwaters. North of the river, Foch had placed the men he had commanded at Nancy, his Twentieth Corps. Since he had commanded them at Morhange and the Trouée de Charmes, they had served under him on the northern front, and for awhile had been sent away to help Nivelle and Pétain to turn

the tide of battle at Verdun. They were now again under their old commander, and they were given the post of honour in the line, where they were to keep touch with the British advance and hold the separate flank of the French front with old Péronne for their objective, once the ground along the Somme could be cleared.

Foch's line was made up of the two armies of Generals Fayolle and Guillaumat, the former on the left, the latter on the right. From Maricourt, north of the Somme, the line extended southward to near Estrées on the great highway from St. Quentin to Amiens.

At the outset, the French advance made rapid progress. On July the first, the line was everywhere pushed a mile forward, and in some places gained even more ground. Next day the progress was somewhat slower, but still there were gains everywhere. By the middle of the month the French had cleared all the ground in the bend of the Somme, and were looking down on Péronne from the high ground of the south bank, but the barrier of swamps barred their way to the old fortress. On the north of the river line, the Twentieth Corps was meeting with dogged resistance, and fighting its way against strong positions, covered with wide barbed-wire entanglements and bristling with machine guns. Everywhere along the northern half of the Allied front, the resistance was more sustained, the defences stronger and the progress slower, than south of the river bend. There is reason to suppose that the Germans expected the attack to be made only on this side. Accordingly they had concentrated their best troops to meet it, and multiplied and skilfully elaborated their entrenchments and strong posts on ground that

lent itself exceptionally well to a prolonged defence. So it was that for awhile the British on the extreme left, in spite of heroic efforts, made no progress and suffered severe loss, while in the centre of the line they won their way slowly. It is no depreciation of the advance made by the French in those first days of the long battle, to say that they had an easier task.

The Battle of the Somme, begun on July 1st, 1916, became a vast series of siege operations, and lasted on into the New Year of 1917, when the German retreat to the Hindenburg line marked its success, and gave the Allies the first gain of ground they had secured since the tide of invasion turned at the Battle of the Marne. Foch directed only the earlier operations of the two armies of Fayolle and Guillaumat. Towards the end of the summer he had temporarily to resign his command through illness.

But he was not long inactive. A short rest restored his health, and the French Government soon made an announcement that proclaimed that his services would still be available to the army. His 65th birthday was approaching—the date that, under French Army Regulations places a general on the retired list; but on September 30th, 1916, the *Official Gazette* announced that on account of his eminent services General Ferdinand Foch was exempted from the regulation, and his name was to remain "without limit of age" on the list of the 1st Section of the General Staff, the list from which men are selected for high command.

He was soon at work again, and engaged on a task for which he was exceptionally well fitted. The French Government decided on the formation of a small committee of officers of rank, whose business it would be

to make careful study of problems that might arise in the coming months of the war, and draw up reports and plans of action for these contingencies. General Foch was entrusted with the formation of this committee and the direction of the work. It was a wise step, and gave most useful results. For Foch personally, it was one of the most fortunate events in a career, in which each episode seems to have been a preparation for tasks he would later on be called upon to undertake. It was in this case a preparation for the united command of the Allied forces, though at the time no one could foresee, either that such an appointment would ever be made, or that Foch would be given this eminent position.

Foch selected the two helpers that he required, taking Weygaud—who had been so long his chief of the staff, and was promoted to the rank of General—as his right-hand man. The new organization was really a committee of the General Staff, and one would have expected that its centre of work would have been at Paris. But Foch had no liking for great cities, least of all for Paris, where official work means constant touch with the ceremonial side of public life. He is a lover of the country, and at the same time a hater of display of any kind. We have seen how he invariably chose for his headquarters, when in command of a large "group of armies," not a great city, but a little country town or village, where he could do his work free from the ceremonial state that so often gathers round a centre of high command. He now chose for his centre of work the little cathedral city of Senlis, about thirty miles from Paris. Its twelfth century cathedral gives it the nominal dignity of a city, but it is really only a little country town, almost surrounded by the forests of

Chantilly, Halatte and Ermonville. It is just far enough from Paris to be a quiet restful place, and yet near enough to make communication with the capital easy and rapid if need be.

Foch made occasional visits to Paris to confer with Joffre and the Government. But he and General Weygaud also made longer journeys. For awhile, Foch and most of his staff of helpers were in the east of France, studying on the spot the means to be taken to deal with a possible new offensive of the Germans through the Belfort Gap, which might also be combined with a violation of Swiss neutrality, in order to turn the French defence works of the Jura. There was a moment when German concentrations in Alsace and the Black Forest region pointed to such a possibility, and rumour told of an intended reinforcement of the attack by Austro-Hungarian troops, brought up by the railways of South Germany. It did not happen, but it was a possibility, and Foch's business was to prepare plans for any possible new development, so that if it arose, the means of meeting it would not have to be improvised at the last moment.

Another eventuality, which actually arose and had to be dealt with later on, was the possibility of an Austrian or combined Austro-German advance into Italy with forces so great that it might be necessary to send French and British help to the Italian army across the Alps from the Western Front. So far things had gone well for the Allied cause in Italy, though events had not justified the sanguine forecasts of the press, that raised the hopes of the Allied peoples so high, when Italy declared war against Austria, in 1915. In those days, there was talk of the occupation of Trieste and Trent

being among the early events of the Austro-Italian campaign. But the difficulties of the Italian operations had been strangely underrated by those who indulged in these optimistic predictions. For months the mountain ramparts of the Austro-Italian frontier defied attack. Reckless valour, directed with consummate skill of command, and aided by every resource of the artillerist and the engineer, failed to make much impression on the dogged resistance with which the enemy held his position among the limestone ridges of the Carso and the glaciers of the Alps, and in the mountain-walled valleys of the Dolomites and the Trentino. After a year of war, the Italians were nowhere as much as fifteen miles beyond their frontier. They were still fighting upon it, along the great Carnic mountain wall. In the summer of 1916, they repelled a dangerous counter-attack from the Trentino. In August, they took Gorizia, but the Austrian guns still menaced the battered city from precipitous heights not two miles away. To the north of it, the mountains that look down on the Isonzo were firmly held. To the south, all progress was barred among the rocks of the Carso. Italy was feeling severely the strain of the long-drawn battle, that had given such scanty results. Foch, looking to the chances of the future, felt that it was well to study on the spot and in touch with the Italian staff, the double question of whether the Allies could give direct help to carry the attack on the Austrian positions forward, and the problem of how effective help could be given to the Italian army, in case of a renewed counter-attack by the enemy on a greater scale than that of the offensive that had been repulsed in the summer of 1916.

Having completed his study of the defences of the

Belfort and Jura region, Foch now took up the question of the Italian front. In the winter of 1916-17, during the pause in the operations enforced by frost and snow on the Alpine frontier, he made more than one visit to Italy. He had conferences with Cadorna and the Italian staff, and visited the fronts held by the army. Then he proceeded to draw up detailed schemes for the rapid transport of French and British troops to northern Italy, in case their services should be needed. His long study of Napoleon's campaigns had made him familiar with all the problems of the defence of the plain of northern Italy against an Austrian invasion.

The result of these studies was, that, when the emergency arose before another year had gone by, nothing had to be improvised. The plans for sending speedy help to Italy and saving the situation at a moment of the direst peril were all ready.

Of course, at the time and for long after, nothing could be heard of all this most valuable activity and its results. The name of Foch had for months been unmentioned in the public press. He seemed to have disappeared from the scene of the war.

By the end of 1916, there had been important changes in the French higher command. Joffre had resigned the position of generalissimo of the French armies, and had been succeeded by General Nivelle. In the first stage of the war, Nivelle had held the rank of Colonel of Artillery. He had been promoted to the rank of General after the Battle of the Marne. He had risen to fame as the defender of Verdun with Pétain, and had increased his reputation by his counter-attacks on the German lines before the fortress, in which attacks he had won back much of the ground lost in the first onset

of the enemy. His appointment to the post of Commander-in-Chief was very popular. In England some of the newspapers began an agitation for a further enlargement of his command, suggesting that he should be given full control of both the French and the British armies in France and Flanders, and urging amongst other arguments that he was specially fitted for such an international command, because on his mother's side he was of English descent. It was the first time that the appointment of a single Commander-in-Chief for the Western Front had been suggested. But the proposal led to nothing.

Other changes had taken place in the command of the three groups of French armies. De Castelnau, after having helped to reorganize the defence of Verdun in the first days of danger, was given the command of the eastern group from Verdun to the Swiss frontier. He held this post, when Foch visited the Belfort-Jura region to study its defence. Pétain was in command of the central group; and D'Esperey had taken over Foch's former command of the northern front.

CHAPTER XVI

CHIEF OF THE FRENCH GENERAL STAFF

At the beginning of the New Year of 1917, Foch was still engaged in the staff work that was to occupy him for some time to come. The first weeks of the year saw the beginning of a wide-reaching change in the situation on the Western Front. On the Somme battle ground, which had been for six months the scene of continuous fighting, the Germans had gradually been forced back to a line which ran from the high ground about the gorge of the little river Ancre, along the strongly-entrenched Bapaume ridge, and then by the heights north of Péronne to the old fortress, secure for awhile in its girdle of marsh and river. The line then followed for a few miles the east bank of the Somme, and then crossed it, and pushed out into a broad salient, south of the Amiens-St. Quentin road.

But even the hard wintry weather did not put an end to the Somme battle. In January and the first days of February, Haig by a series of masterly operations forced the strong positions on the Ancre heights, breaking into the German line at a critical point, and threatening the flank of the Bapaume ridge defences. This was the decisive climax of the long battle. In the last days of February, the Germans gave way before the menace to their flank, and their retreat began all along the Somme front.

All through the month of March, the British and the

French were gaining ground day by day. Every despatch sent news of the re-occupation of towns and villages long held by the invader. Optimists indulged in predictions of the early collapse of the enemy's power. But, as yet, though the Germans were defeated, there was no collapse. Their retreat was well conducted, and they were falling back on carefully prepared positions. Hindenburg—a name popular in Germany since the victory of Tannenberg—was given general command of the western operations. His name was popularly associated with the new line, on which the Germans at last made a stand. The Hindenburg line became a current term, sometimes applied to one strong line of trenches that formed a feature of the new front, but in its wider sense denoting the whole system of positions in front of the line—Douai-Cambrai-St. Quentin-Laon. The right flank linked up with the salient formed by the defences of Lens and the Vimy Ridge, whence the German front extended by the positions covering Lille to the lines before Ypres, and so to the sea. The left rested on the wooded hills that protected Laon, and the inundations of the Oise about the advanced post, La Fère.

To understand the course of events that brought Foch the supreme command of the Allied Armies in the West, we must touch upon the chief events of this critical year, 1917.

While the Germans were retiring to the Hindenburg line, there came the sudden thunderclap of the Russian Revolution. The optimist spirit of the press, and of public and official opinion in France and England, led to the most sanguine hopes being based upon every change in the situation. A mistaken view was generally taken of the Russian Revolution. It was represented

for some time as a movement that would marshal all the strength of Russia against the Austro-German invaders, as the Revolution called forth the fighting power of France against the Allied Sovereigns of old Europe. Disillusion came slowly, and was reluctantly accepted. Event after event, culminating in the collapse of the Russian army in the last effort at an offensive, showed that Russia had for the time being ceased to be a power, and had become a chaos.

The hopeful mood was still in the ascendant in the spring of 1917, and it was not yet realized that before many months Germany would be able to move huge armies from the East, and throw them into the scales of battle on the Western Front. The danger was foreseen by few. It was believed that the Germans in the West would be forced to further retreat. Haig was anxious to carry out a plan he had prepared for a new offensive, that might drive them from the Belgian coast; but he accepted a plan proposed by the new French generalissimo, Nivelle. The British were to attack from Arras, against the left centre of the German line towards Cambrai and St. Quentin. The French were to storm the heights covering Laon, and thus make a converging attack on the German flank. Haig attacked on a wide front, in April and May. The Vimy Ridge was stormed; the advance was pushed close to the suburbs of Lens. The Germans were forced back on a front of nearly sixteen miles to a depth of from two to four. Round St. Quentin, where the British and French lines met, ground was won, that half enclosed the German positions about the city. Nivelle, attacking on a long front that extended to the east of Rheims, captured some of the enemy's positions, won a footing on the eastern end

of the Aisne heights, but failed in what should have been the decisive thrust towards Laon. The great battle died down before the strong positions on which the Germans had retired in the Cambrai region; and their line facing the French was almost intact. It was a disappointing result, and Nivelle was superseded in the chief command of the French armies, being replaced by General Pétain, on May 15th. Foch was on the same day given the appointment of Chief of the General Staff of the French army.

This appointment made Paris his usual place of residence. His work was at the Headquarters of the General Staff, and he had to keep in close touch with the Government. Pétain was not carrying out any operations of wide scope on the French front. After the close of the offensive in the early summer, he was devoting himself to local improvements in the line, the chief of which was the further thrusting back of the Germans from the Verdun front. The main operation of the second half of 1917 was in the hands of Haig and the British, with some co-operation from the French troops north of Ypres. Haig was acting on his plan for forcing the enemy from the Belgian coast districts, and, as a first step, was gradually clearing the ridges east and north-east of Ypres—a task not unlike that of the patient conquest of the German positions on the Somme battlefield the year before. In the autumn, cold rainy weather, that made even the slopes into greasy quagmires, added to the difficulties of the advance—which finally reached the village of Passchendaele in November.

By this time northern Italy had become the most important centre of the war in the West. In October

an Austro-German offensive was launched against the Italian front on the Isonzo. It broke through the line at Caporetto, and the whole defence gave way from that point to the sea. The invaders poured into Venetia, making enormous captures of prisoners, guns, war matériel and stores of all kinds; and the Italian army was forced back across the Tagliamento and the Livenza, making at last a halt behind the Piave line, while a new offensive developed on its flank from the Trentino.

The state of affairs had arisen, which Foch had studied months before as a possible contingency of the war. The Italian Government was appealing for help, with its army compelled to abandon hundreds of miles of mountain frontier and fall back into the northern plain. Foch was rightly judged to be the man to arrange that this help should be promptly and effectively given. He was sent to Italy as the chief of a military mission. British and French reinforcements were already moving south and crossing the Alps. The plans he had drawn up for the event were being executed. His business was to confer with the Italian staff, and see that all necessary arrangements were made for the new reinforcements coming quickly into line.

During this visit to Italy, Foch met Mr. Lloyd George, at the conference held at Rapallo on the Riviera, in which representatives of Britain, France and Italy, took part, both the civilian and military leaders being represented.

At the Rapallo conference a very important decision was arrived at—namely, the formation of a central council which was to secure, if not unity of command, at least a general unity of direction for the Allied Armies on the Western Front. And this front was now under-

stood to include the Italian lines on the Piave and the Trentino border. It was a front extending from the North Sea to the Mediterranean, with one interruption, where Switzerland still maintained its neutrality, an island of peace in the midst of the deluge of European war.

It was a first step in the new evolution by which before long General Foch was to become the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in the West. Before following further the story of the new agreement between Britain, France and Italy, that was settled at Rapallo, it will be well to give the terms of this important document as it was later communicated to the House of Commons by Mr. Lloyd George:

1. With a view to the better co-ordination of military action on the Western front, a Supreme War Council is created, composed of the Prime Minister and a member of the Government of each of the Great Powers whose armies are fighting on that front. The extension of the scope of the Council to other fronts is reserved for discussion with the other Great Powers.

2. The Supreme War Council has for its mission to watch over the general conduct of the war. It prepares recommendations for the decision of the Governments, and keeps itself informed of their execution, and reports thereon to the respective governments.

3. The General Staff and military commands of the Armies of each Power, charged with the conduct of military operations remain responsible to their respective governments.

4. The general war plans drawn up by the competent military authorities are submitted to the Supreme War Council, which, under the high authority of the governments, ensures their concordance, and submits, if need be, any necessary changes.

5. Each Power delegates to the Supreme War Council one permanent military representative, whose exclusive function is to act as technical adviser to the Council.

6. The military representatives receive from the Government and the competent military authority of their country all the proposals, information and documents, relating to the conduct of the war.

7. The military representatives watch day by day the situation of the forces, and the means of all kinds of which the Allied Armies and the enemy armies dispose.

8. The Supreme War Council meets ordinarily at Versailles, where the permanent military representatives and their staffs are established. They may meet at other places, as may be agreed upon, according to the circumstances. The meetings of the Supreme War Council will take place at least once a month.

It appears that before Mr. Lloyd George left London, on November 4th, for Italy, the suggested had been drafted by the War Cabinet. He was in Paris on his way home a week later, and reached London on the evening of the 13th; so this important step had been very quickly decided upon. In Paris, at a luncheon presided over by the French Prime Minister, M. Painlevé, he made a remarkable speech. He explained afterwards that he put things with brutal frankness in order to arouse public opinion to the serious position of affairs and enforce the necessity of the new departure. Perhaps in his anxiety to influence opinion, he indulged in exaggeration. He dwelt on various alleged mistakes in the conduct of the war by the Allied Powers, on lost opportunities and disasters that might have been averted. There had been conferences and consultations, he said, and after each it was proclaimed that the unity of the Allies was complete; but "that unity, in so far

as strategy went, was pure make-believe; and make-believe may live through a generation of peace—it cannot survive a week of war." It was necessary to oppose united action by the Allies to the united command of the Central Powers, and the means had now been found to secure this. The Italian disaster might yet save the Allies by enforcing this co-ordination of plans. The new Supreme War Council would give a unity which would be "not a fraud, but a fact."

Next day Mr. Lloyd George was in London, and on the 14th he explained to the House of Commons the constitution and objects of the new Council. Shortly after it was announced that the military representatives of the three Powers would be Sir Henry Wilson for England, General Cadorna for Italy, and General Foch for France.

Mr. Lloyd George's Paris speech had naturally provoked a good deal of criticism. The new Council was also the subject of much controversy. Everyone was agreed that co-ordination of the Allied plans and unity of strategic direction were all important. But many questioned whether the Council was the best means of securing these ends, and indeed whether it would prove to be a good working organization. Soldiers, as a rule do not trust the control of warlike operations by a committee. They like better the guidance of a single mind. The French newspapers began at once to suggest that the best use that could be made of the Supreme War Council would be to make it a stepping-stone to the appointment of a supreme Commander-in-Chief. The idea was not at first welcomed in England, though it found some supporters. But English criticism ran chiefly on the line, that the powers and duties of the new

Council were very vaguely defined; that it was not clear whether it was to be merely advisory or executive; and that it would not be an easy matter to combine its action with the existing system under which in each country the Government was responsible for the conduct of the war, acting on information and advice received from the General Staff, while the commanders in the field carried out the policy thus outlined for them.

There is no need here to discuss the controversy further. The creation of the new Council is of interest in connection with the career of General Foch, chiefly because it actually proved to be the first step to his advancement to the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies. In November, 1917, the time was not yet ripe for such an appointment to be made. There is proof of this, so far as English opinion is concerned in the fact that, when the policy of the Supreme War Council was formally debated in the House of Commons, on November 19th, both Mr. Asquith, who opened the debate, and Mr. Lloyd George who replied to his questions and criticisms, joined in deprecating the idea of a "generalissimo" of the armies on the Western Front being appointed.

"In France," said Mr. Asquith, "I observe that the formation of the Council has been hailed in some quarters, and very authoritative quarters, as the first, and only the first, step to a much more drastic change. Unity of control in their view is soon to develop into unity of command. I desire to read into it no such ulterior purpose. If I were compelled to do so, I should be able, I believe, to submit to the House overwhelming arguments against it."

Mr. Lloyd George spoke even more strongly. In

dealing with possible alternatives to the Council as a means of securing unity of control, he referred to the fact that the idea had been put forward "in very responsible quarters" of the appointment of a generalissimo of the Allied forces. And he went on to say, "Personally, I am utterly opposed to that suggestion, for reasons which it would not be desirable to enter into now. It would not work. It would produce real friction, and might really produce it not merely between the armies, but between the nations and the governments as well."

Thus, in November, 1917, the responsible leaders of English opinion were agreed that the idea of placing the various national armies on the Western Front under a single commander and fusing them into one international army was so far outside the range of practical politics, that there was no need even to discuss it as a possibility. But the "drastic change" was not far off. And it may safely be said that while the course of events suggested it, it was the personal character of General Foch, and the solid confidence he inspired in all the armies, that made the change possible.

Until at some future day the full official record of the war is available, nothing can be said of the inner working of the new Council and the results it obtained during this first brief stage of its existence. The political members, the ministers of the Allied Governments, met from time to time at Versailles. The military members worked day by day. They were soon joined by a new colleague, the American General Bliss. Foch, with his experience as a commander in the field, and later as the director of the committee that used to meet at Senlis to study war problems, and with his actual position as

Chief-of-the-Staff of the French army, had a special competence for his task as the French representative, and was able to give most efficient help to the Council.

The military situation was still anxious. The Italian front strengthened by British and French reinforcements, had held firm on the Piave, until the wintry weather put a stop to active operations on the dangerous Alpine flank of the line. In France the dash of Byng's army towards Cambrai, which at first seemed to promise great results, was followed by a counter-attack, that gave back to the enemy most of what he had lost, while the element of successful surprise in the counterstroke, produced an unpleasant impression. But most serious of all was the change in the general conditions of the war, produced by the collapse of Russia. It was certain that during the winter the enemy would be able to transfer thousands of guns, and a huge army of more than a million men, from east to west; and it was predicted that early in the New Year the German Staff would make an attempt on a gigantic scale to overwhelm the Allies in France and Flanders before the new armies that the United States were raising and training would be ready in any large numbers for active service on the Western Front.

CHAPTER XVII

"CO-ORDINATOR" OF THE ALLIED OPERATIONS

In the first weeks of 1918, along the Western Front there was more activity in the air than on the ground. British and French airmen were asserting that mastery, which was to prove a most important factor in the operations of the coming summer. For awhile little was heard of the military action of the Versailles Council. But after the meeting held at the beginning of February it was announced officially that "The functions of the Council itself were enlarged, and the principles of unity of policy and action initiated at Rapallo in November received still further concrete and practical development." This announcement was coupled with a statement in reply to suggestions for negotiations thrown out by the German Chancellor and the Austro-Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs. These declarations of policy would of course originate with the Allied Governments represented at the meeting by their Premiers and Foreign Secretaries. But important military decisions in connection with the impending German offensive must have been taken at the same time, for the military element was strongly represented at the meeting, which lasted for four days, from Wednesday, January 30th, to Saturday, February 2nd. The official communiqué, in mentioning those who were present, indicated a change in the constitution of the Council on its military side.

It was stated that among those who took part in the proceedings were "the military representatives of the Supreme War Council (General Weygaud, General Sir H. W. Wilson, General Cadorna and General Bliss). There were also present, for the greater part of the purely military discussion, the French and British Chiefs of the General Staff (General Foch and General Sir W. Robertson), the Italian Minister of War (General Alfieri) and the Commanders-in-Chief on the Western Front (General Pétain, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and General Pershing).

When the Council was formed, in November, 1917, General Foch, while still retaining his position as Chief of the French General Staff, had been appointed to represent France at Versailles. But evidently he had by this time found that the double duty was too heavy a burden, even for his indefatigable industry, and had secured the appointment of his right-hand man, General Weygaud, as his substitute. By this arrangement he would have more time for his Staff work, while still being able to influence the decisions of the Council on military policy.

In the House of Commons, the Government was questioned as to the nature and extent of the "enlargement of the Council's functions," but refused to give any specific information. In reply to a question as to whether "unity of command had been attained" Mr. Bonar Law said:—"If the honourable gentleman means 'Has a Generalissimo been appointed?' the answer is 'No'."

M. Clemenceau, to whom Foch had owed his appointment as Director of the École de Guerre, was now Prime Minister of France. Writers in the Paris press, who

were known to be in close touch with Clemenceau and whose articles were sometimes used as the means of giving publicity to official views without directly involving the authority of the Government—announced that the Supreme War Council had fully considered the possibilities of the threatened German offensive, which was now regarded as imminent, and had taken effective measures not only to deal with it, but also for "subsequent retaliation." In England, Ministers spoke hopefully of the outlook. While recognizing that a time of trial was approaching, they declared that the army in France was never stronger or in a better position to meet an attack on a grand scale.

There was fine weather, and all through February the great offensive was expected from day to day. Some of the Berlin papers predicted that February, 1918 would be a glorious date in the annals of the German army. But throughout the month there was a strange lull along the German lines in the West. The war correspondents on the British front told of the enemy's almost "ostentatious idleness." In many places, even the ordinary routine of trench warfare seemed to have been abandoned for awhile. Snipers were no longer busy. The artillery loosed off perhaps half-a-dozen shells in the day here and there. Occasionally a trench mortar got to work for a few minutes. British raids produced no attempt at retaliation. But British and French airmen brought reports that far behind the inactive front lines there was a ceaseless activity. Troops and convoys were moving westward by rail and road; and at large instruction camps well to the rear, bodies of troops were carrying out field-day manœuvres, the chief feature of which was the attack in masses

against prepared positions representing the Allied entrenchments.

At times, the lull on the front was interrupted by local operations, but these were mostly initiated by the Allies. In Italy, an attack over ice and snow won back some of the ground lost in the early winter on the Asiago plateau. A German thrust in the woods north of Verdun was repulsed with heavy loss to the assailants. The Canadians raided the outskirts of Lens. The French made local attacks in the Argonne and on the Lorraine front. At the end of the month, the artillery became again busy on both sides.

But February passed by without the offensive developing. In the press, at home in England, there were suggestions thrown out that perhaps after all it was a gigantic " bluff," meant to divert attention from some new enterprise in the East or a renewed attack upon Italy. But the chiefs of the Allied Armies on the Western Front had no such illusions. They knew that the critical moment could not now be far off.

The despatches of Sir Douglas Haig, given to the public on October 21st, 1918, though they leave certain points still unexplained, open up much interesting information as to the general situation before the German offensive began. Incidentally they tell something of the arrangements to meet it that had been concerted with General Foch and the French Staff.

For the time being, the Allies had had to adopt a defensive policy. By the end of January, 1918, the British lines had been further extended southwards, Haig taking over from the French about twenty-eight miles of new front on his right, and thus carrying the

British line to the left bank of the Oise. The whole front held by Haig's armies was now 125 miles.

On all the southern part of the front, the British had for more than a year been acting on the offensive, and their entrenchments now represented positions which had not been long held, and which were therefore not very elaborately fortified. Much work would have to be done to prepare them for a serious and prolonged defence, and to improve the railway and road communications in their rear, where a wide zone of the ground had been reduced to a chaotic condition during the months of the Somme battle. Haig explains that his men were so continually occupied with this work, that little time could be found to give them special training for defensive operations. It was on the line south of Arras, including the twenty-eight miles of front taken over from the French, that the heaviest work had to be done. Haig believed that it was the most likely point for the German attack; but, after providing for the rest of the line, there was only a limited force available for its immediate defence. It was held by the Fifth Army under General Gough, who had the French on his right beyond the Oise, and the Third Army under General Byng on his left about Arras.

Sir Douglas Haig refers in his despatch to the fact that arrangements had been made for French co-operation, adding that "among the many problems studied by the Allied Staffs, those involved by a hostile offensive on the line of the Somme River, and the passage of that river by the enemy, had been worked out." This shows that, in its study of the question of defence against the German offensive, the Versailles Council had faced the possibility that there would have to be a retirement be-

fore the weight that the enemy could put into his first onset.

In the second week of March, the German artillery became more active along the front. Here and there at times its fire rose to the intensity of a heavy bombardment, such as might be the prelude of an attack. Local attacks were actually made on a considerable scale. Some heavy firing resulted in Flanders, on the Cambrai front, in Champagne and north of Verdun. But none of these attacks lasted for more than a few hours; they were evidently feints meant to divert attention from the real danger point. But the British airmen had obtained abundant evidence of a concentration before our front, between Arras and the Oise; and Sir Douglas Haig reports in his despatch, that on Tuesday, March 19th, he had information that the German preparations were complete and he expected the attack within the next two days.

Though it was thus anticipated, when the great offensive began in the early morning of Thursday, March 21st, it was something of a surprise. It was a fine day, without any wind, and there was a dense fog hanging low on the ground, limiting the range of vision in most places to about fifty yards. Before dawn, thousands of German guns had been heavily shelling the front. Guns of longer range began firing over the lines, bursting their heavy shells miles to the rear, along the lines by which support could be sent up to the front. This went on during the morning hours. About 10 A.M., spreading gas clouds began to mingle with the fog, and in the semi-darkness more than half a million of the enemy advanced to the attack, on a front of nearly fifty miles. Behind the advance, at least an equal force was being

hurried up by road and rail to support it. When the fog cleared later in the day, our airmen, flying over the German lines, reported that for miles to the rear of the enemy, the roads were packed with marching columns.

The marvel is, not that the British line was forced back, but that for awhile it made only a slow retirement. By evening the extent of this retirement was nowhere as much as two miles. All available reserves were hurried up; but the enemy's attack was also being reinforced, and on the Friday more ground was lost. In the next three days, the enemy was pushing forward rapidly. On the left, it is true, the positions covering Arras were held; but further south the whole British line was being forced back. On the battlefields of the Somme, ridges and ruined villages, that had cost weeks to capture, were lost in a few hours. The enemy was in Peronne, and the line of the Somme to the south of it had been abandoned. By Tuesday, the 26th, he was close up to Albert, and the Ancre heights had been captured; and on the other flank the enemy was near Roye, and was forcing the French out of Noyon. The front of the German advance formed a huge blunted salient north and south of the St. Quentin-Amiens road, with the point dangerously near the latter city. German reports claimed the capture of more than a thousand guns and tens of thousands of prisoners.

On this day an important conference met at Doullens, north of Amiens, where Foch had had his headquarters in 1914. It was now within hearing of the cannon thunder from the battlefield. The Allied Governments were represented by M. Clemenceau for France and Lord Milner for England. Sir Douglas Haig was there with more than one of his army commanders; and sev-

eral of the French generals were present, amongst them General Foch.

All present realized how serious was the situation, and the momentous decision taken in order to deal with it was the placing of the Allied operations under the resourceful control of Foch. It is said that the proposal came from Clemenceau. But whoever originated it, it was at once unanimously adopted.

The position thus assigned to the great soldier was practically, but as yet not nominally, that of Commander-in-Chief. In England the impression given by official utterances gave the impression that he was to be the supreme adviser of the defence measures to be taken by the Allied armies. If he could not issue formal orders, his plans and dispositions were certain to be accepted without cavil or hesitation. Although he at once took charge of the operations, it was not until March 30th that his appointment was publicly announced. On that day, too, he received a welcome offer of support from General Pershing. The American army in France was still in the stage of organizing and training, but Pershing had available many units that he considered to be available for the battle line. He went to Foch's headquarters, and personally offered the services of his officers and men.

"I have come," he said, "to tell you that the American people would consider it a great honour to have our troops engaged in the present battle. I ask for this in its name and in my own. Just now, the only question is fighting. Our infantry, artillery, flying men—all that we have is at your disposal. More are coming—as many as may be required. I have come expressly to tell you that the American people will be proud to

have their troops engaged in the greatest and finest battle in history."

The offer was at once accepted, and it was arranged that American battalions should be temporarily brigaded with British troops.

The official announcement issued on this day to the English press by Mr. Lloyd George, stated that for the first few days after the German offensive was launched, the situation had been "extremely critical." The position had improved, but the struggle was still only in its "opening stage," and no prediction of the future could yet be made. The governments of Great Britain, France and America were taking combined measures to deal with the emergency. Then the communication went on to announce General Foch's appointment, in these words:

"The enemy has had the incalculable advantage of fighting as one army. To meet this, the Allies have, since the battle began, taken a most important decision. With the cordial co-operation of the British and French Commanders-in-Chief, General Foch has been charged by the British, French and American governments, to co-ordinate the action of the Allied armies on the Western Front."

"Co-ordination" was the word which had been used to describe the object of the Versailles Council. It had the advantages and disadvantages of a certain vagueness, and its use left Foch's position anything but clearly defined. The *Times* in its leading article referred to what it called "bygone discussions of the generalissimo ideal," and suggested that "the public would be well advised to accept the official statement as meaning precisely what it says." The drawback was,

that the meaning was anything but precise. The *Times* writer went on to say: "General Foch, as we understand the position, neither possesses nor desires the title of Generalissimo. His function is properly described by the Government as that of co-ordinating the action of the Allied armies. The distinction may seem to be more verbal than real, but it is sufficiently plain to those who have followed the events of the last few months and the selection of General Foch is itself a guarantee that the work of these months—in spite of all its interruptions and slowness—has nevertheless been broadly continuous."

The progress was to continue to its logical conclusion, and that before many days had gone by. Meanwhile, we may be quite certain that Foch cared very little for verbal distinctions about his appointment, so long as he had the power to carry out the plans he had rapidly formed. He knew he could rely upon the most ready and loyal co-operation on the part of Sir Douglas Haig and the British generals. Haig evidently took a more matter-of-fact view of the situation than that adopted either by the politicians or the leader-writers. In his despatch he frankly stated that "on this day, March 26th, the governments of France and Great Britain decided to place the supreme control of the operations of the French and British armies in France and Belgium in the hands of General Foch, who accordingly assumed control."

Thus on the very day of the meeting at Doullens, he began to issue his directions for the operations that were to avert the danger to Amiens and the Allied line.

CHAPTER XVIII

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ALLIES

When Foch took control of the operations, on March 26th, the German advance had made such progress, that the enemy's immediate objects were clearly revealed. The German staff was aiming at breaking through the Allied line on a wide front, and separating the French from the British army. There was a direct push for Amiens, the great junction of roads and railways which is the working centre of communication between Paris and the north of France; and linked up with this there was a secondary push down the Oise valley, to break through at the actual point where the two armies joined hands.

Foch's first efforts were directed to holding up the advance on Amiens, and at the same time hurrying up reinforcements to block the enemy's advance along the Oise from Noyon, and strengthen this vital point of the Allied line.

It was all-important to relieve with fresh troops the hard-tried brigades and divisions that had been fighting for nearly a week. Even with their superior forces, the Germans had found it difficult to disengage the troops in the front line and bring fresh units into it. On both sides there were signs of exhaustion. One of the narratives of the battle tells how on the sixth day of the fighting the firing died away at points even where British and Germans were in close contact, and what were

described as counter-attacks really meant that a few hundred haggard men were got together, and went forward for a short distance, while the equally weary enemy fell back before them, and presently the effort to get forward ended, and both sides lay down again. Amid this growing exhaustion, it was only the arrival of fresh troops on both sides that could keep the battle going. Haig had drawn some new divisions from the Flanders front, where they could ill be spared; and these had been sent into the battle, as they arrived. Foch was bringing troops from the Champagne front and from the east of France, improvising a local reserve even at the risk of weakening the line elsewhere. At first, nothing could be kept in hand to form a striking force for a special effort. The troops, as they arrived, were pushed into the line between the Amiens-Paris railway and the Oise, where the French front, forced back by the German advance had been lengthened by many miles and was in danger of breaking. The French were barring the enemy's advance on this side. Haig was holding the direct road to Amiens, and opposing the German effort to break through above Arras and from the Ancre heights in order to envelop Amiens from the northern side. The Germans were still making progress at some points. They occupied Albert on the night of the 26th-27th, and on the 28th they took Montdidier, thus cutting a useful railway-line connecting Amiens with the French right. But the great rush had been stopped. Fresh troops were arriving every hour and reinforcements for Haig had begun to cross the Channel from England at a rate which rose to thirty thousand in a day. On the evening of the 28th, Foch felt so well satisfied with the situation, that he ordered that hence-

forth troops on arriving should not be sent immediately into the line, but given a rest after their long journey in the troop trains.

We learn from a few words, which he said to a party of English, French and American journalists, to whom he gave an interview at his headquarters a few days later, that he regarded March 27th as the turning-point of the battle. Perhaps it is an exaggeration to describe the meeting as an interview; for Foch is one of the very few public men of our time who have never been interviewed in the strict journalistic sense of the word. The correspondents had asked to see him, and were invited to meet him at his headquarters near Amiens. One of them tells how they were struck by the fact that the room in which he met them, and where he evidently did his work, was almost bare. The chief piece of furniture was a table covered with green baize, on which there was nothing but a telephone and a pad of paper. On the wall close by was a large map of the battle region, marked with coloured chalks. A staff officer rapidly introduced the journalists in succession by name, and Foch made the briefest of speeches, speaking, says one of them, "in a low, measured voice, with his eyes sometimes half-closed."

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "as you know, our affairs are not going badly. The enemy is blocked in since the 27th of March. You can see it on that map. The wave has broken on the beach; that means, it has come up against a serious obstacle. We have stopped it. And now we are going to try to do still better. I don't know if I can say any more to you."

He paused for a moment. A heavy shower of rain was beating against the windows. "It is wretched

weather," he said; "but we must take it as it comes. I wish you better weather and good news. It is a time when we all have to work hard. You will work with your pens, and we with our arms."

With this the interview ended. The General had not told the journalists much, but he had given them the impression that he was well satisfied with the situation on the fighting front.

In the first week of April the situation steadily improved. The Allied defence was becoming more and more solid. If here and there the enemy won a little ground, it was almost invariably regained by a counter-attack within a few hours. There were signs that the Germans were seeking rather to keep the British and French troops in their front occupied than to make any serious attempt to press the attack. As a matter of fact, they were suspending the push towards Amiens until they could improve their communications over the ground they had won, and meanwhile they were preparing for a new enterprise in another direction.

On April 9th, in the House of Commons, Mr. Lloyd George introduced his proposals for a further extension of the Military Service Acts, and gave an account of the situation in France since March 21st. General Foch's appointment was now described as something more than that of a mere "co-ordinator" of the military operations. The Prime Minister at last ventured to say that he was in supreme command, and described the duties entrusted to him.

"A few days after the battle commenced, not merely the Government, but the commanders in the field—we had not merely the Field Marshal but all the commanders present—were so convinced—and the same

thing applies to the French army, they were so convinced—of the necessity of a more complete strategic unity, that they agreed to the appointment of General Foch to the supreme direction of the strategy of all the Allied armies on the Western Front.

"May I just say one word about General Foch? It is not merely that he is one of the most brilliant soldiers in Europe. He is a man who, when we were attacked and were in a similar plight at the first battle of Ypres, rushed the French army there by every conceivable expedient—omnibuses, cabs, lorries, anything he could lay his hands upon—he crowded French divisions through, and undoubtedly helped to win that great battle. There is no doubt about the loyalty and comradeship of General Foch.

"I have no doubt that this arrangement will be carried out not only in the letter but in the spirit. It is the most important decision that has been taken in reference to the coming battle. This strategic unity is, I submit it to the House, a fundamental condition of victory. It can only be maintained by complete co-operation between the governments and the generals, and by something more than that—unmistakable public opinion behind it. Why do I say that? For this reason. A Generalissimo in the ordinary and full sense of the term may be impracticable. There are three functions which a Generalissimo wields—the strategical, the tactical and the administrative. What does the administrative mean? It means the control of the organization, the appointment and dismissal of officers and generals, and that is a power which it is almost impossible to give to a general of another country with a national army. Therefore, in spite of all the arrangements made, unless

there be not merely good will but the knowledge that the public, in France, Great Britain and America will assist in co-ordination and in supporting the authorities in the supreme strategical plans chosen by the governments, and in any action they may take to assert their authority, any arrangements made will be futile and mischievous.

"I make no apology for dwelling at some length upon this point. I have always felt that we are losing value and efficiency in the Allied armies through lack of co-ordination and concentration. We have sustained many disasters already through that, and we shall encounter more unless this defect in our machinery is put right. Hitherto, I regret to say, every effort at amendment has led to rather prolonged and very bitter controversy, and these difficulties, these great inherent difficulties, were themselves accentuated and aggravated. There were difficulties of carrying out plans, and other obstacles, and what is worse, valuable time is lost. I entreat the nation as a whole to stand united for a united control of the strategical operations of our armies at the front. We know how much depends upon unity of concentration. We are fighting a very powerful foe, who in so far as he has triumphed, has triumphed mainly because of the superior unity and concentration of his strategic plans."

On the same day in the House of Lords, Lord Curzon, speaking for the Government, announced that so far as the operations were concerned General Foch was in complete control, adding that he was not a Generalissimo is the sense of taking charge of the administration as well as the operations of the armies. "The strategical control," he said, "ought to be invested in single

hands, or—should he say—in a single brain? We have suffered grievously from the want of this in the past. In these circumstances, if by common consent a single direction was required, it could only be by a Frenchman; and if a Frenchman—by General Foch."

Lord Crewe, speaking for the opposition, welcomed the appointment, saying that, "So far as a single command was concerned, there was no officer of the French army more admired or more trusted by the British troops than General Foch."

Utterances like these gave voice to the public feeling of confidence in the new Commander-in-Chief of the Allied armies. The British generals in the field had welcomed his appointment; and Lord French not long after spoke of him as the greatest leader the war had produced. But still more remarkable was the feeling of confidence that the nomination of Foch to the supreme command called forth in the rank and file of the British army at the front. The soldiers—many of them still in civil life at that time—had heard of him as one of the foremost among the victors of the Marne, even though they knew nothing of his masterly handling of the battle in the French centre. Then they knew something of the fact that he had given loyal and ready help to the hard-pressed British line in the two long battles at Ypres. When the news came that he was in command, there ran through the ranks the feeling, that now the French and British armies were at last fused into one great fighting force under a master of war. It was a private in a line regiment, who said, "We all felt happier for it." Numbers of the officers had been brought into personal relation with Foch, or had learned in one way or another

to appreciate his characteristic qualities for command. By all, from Sir Douglas Haig downwards, he was regarded as the trusted friend of the British army. There was no fear that his view of the situation would be narrowed by any national feeling, or blurred by such ideas as the protection of Paris being the supreme object. He had already in the days of the Ypres battles spoken of the absolute importance of holding at all costs the positions covering the Channel ports, in order to secure this rapid line of communication with England. When first it had been suggested that a single commander should control the operations, there had been talk of the jealousies and anxieties such an appointment might produce. But in the case of Foch, no one thought for a moment of any such difficulties arising. His character and his whole record in the war made him the one man who was peculiarly fitted for the task that was now entrusted to him.

As the fighting before Amiens died down into a desultory conflict between opposing lines, that hardly moved from day to day, he had to devote his attention to another offensive, this time directed against the northern front, where he had first co-operated with the British commanders. On April 7th, the enemy began a heavy bombardment of the Flanders front, from the south of Ypres to La Bassee. Early on the 9th—once more covered by a fog—an attack in overwhelming force was launched against the Allied lines on a wide front. The enemy had to advance across the flat lands by the river Lys, which in an ordinary season would have been impassable at this time of the year. But the late months of the winter had been exceptionally dry. There was plenty of firm ground, and the Lys itself was low. The

river was crossed, and Armentières captured in the first rush. The troops who held this part of the line were the Portuguese division and British divisions, several of which had been engaged in the fighting further south and were sent to rest and reorganize and fill up with new drafts from England. The Germans pressed the attack day after day with forces that everywhere outnumbered the defence. The line was unbroken, but it lost ground for some days. Haig, in order to shorten his front and economize his force, evacuated the Paschendaele ridge and all the ground won to the east of Ypres in the hard fighting of the previous year. The Messines ridge was lost. The enemy was pushing towards Hazebrouck junction and attacking the Kemmel heights. It was a more powerful and more dangerous drive towards the Channel ports than even the great offensives against Ypres in 1914 and 1915. "We are fighting with our backs to the wall," said Haig, in a stirring appeal to his men to stand fast. Foch once more provided ready help. French troops were moved up from the south, and gradually took over a considerable section of the front. The two armies, fighting side by side, at last held the German attack.

But, as it was checked at one part of the front, it was pressed at another. The enemy had the great advantage of having his reserves massed in the inner curve of a huge salient, in a country well provided with railways and first-class roads, and he was thus able to reinforce now one part of the front, now another, more rapidly than the Allies, who had to move on longer lines outside the curving front held by the invaders. As the fighting on the Flanders front became less furious, a new advance was attempted against Amiens. There was a dan-

gerous moment, on April 25th, when the enemy captured Villers Bretonneux, on the spur between the Somme and Avre rivers, east of the city. It is high ground within easy artillery range of Amiens. The place was retaken by a brilliant night attack of Australian troops within twenty-four hours of its loss. The French held a series of attempts to advance from Montdidier against the line of the Clermont-Paris railway. The renewed offensive against Amiens gave the enemy no gain of importance.

The Germans had now pushed two salients into the Allied front, the larger towards Amiens, the smaller on the Flanders border. There was a threat to the Channel ports, a threat against Amiens, and a threat against Paris, this last accentuated by the long guns hidden somewhere in the St. Gobain woods, that sent shells at regular intervals, with a range hitherto unheard of, to burst in the city. Along the fronts of the two salients fighting went on, but the defence was stubbornly holding its own. It was known that the enemy had still large reserves in hand, and the fighting in the salients might at any moment develop into a new drive, or a fresh offensive might be started somewhere else on the line of the front.

Foch was so far acting strictly on the defensive. There were local counter-attacks, but as yet no attempt at any great counterstroke. The time had not arrived for it. If we regard the whole fight on the long front as a great battle, it was still, for Foch, in what he would describe as the preparatory stage. He was holding the enemy fast, making him exhaust his surplus reserves, and beginning to accumulate his own. The Germans left entirely out of their calculations two facts. Eng-

land had rushed across to France a large reinforcement, by sending across the Channel a great part of the army that had hitherto been kept at home as a safeguard—many believed an unnecessary safeguard against the remote chance of a German invasion. And American troops were arriving in large numbers. At the beginning of the year, the Allies had counted on the American army being in great force in France at the earliest in the autumn of 1918. But the despatch of this new army had been accelerated. The moment was near at hand when, instead of being brigaded with British troops, in small numbers, the American soldiers would be ready to take the field in divisions, and even to form an army acting as one of the great units in the battle line. These new resources would soon enable Foch to use as striking forces veteran French and British armies, and to organize an effective counterstroke on a large scale. But the time was not yet come.

In the last week of May, the enemy began another formidable thrust. While the battle became fiercer in Flanders, and desultory fighting continued on the Amiens salient, another great offensive began on the 27th, on a front of some forty miles, extending from the wooded heights southwest of Laon to the neighbourhood of Rheims. In the first rush the Germans scored heavily. By the evening of the 28th, they were over the long ridge of the Aisne heights—the natural rampart that had been the scene of war since 1914—and were down to the river, and at one point across it. Next day they were over the hills south of the Aisne, and their advance had reached the Vesle and in the centre was over the river line. Soissons had to be abandoned by the French, but they held on for awhile to the ground com-

manding the western exits from the place. By May 31st, the point of the new German salient had reached Dormans on the north bank of the Marne.

In the first week of June, the enemy extended his hold on the river bank beyond Château-Thierry. On the other side of the wedge he had driven into the Allied front, he was striving to push in to the south of Rheims. But on both flanks he was now stubbornly opposed; and, after the occupation of Château-Thierry, he failed to enlarge the wedge-like salient. He now sought to gain ground west of Soissons. Between the salient driven towards the Marne and the south side of the Amiens salient, there was a long re-entrant curve in his line from the Aisne heights to the neighbourhood of Montdidier. He tried hard to improve his front here, by pressing forward on both sides of the Oise. Near Montdidier, he gained some ground. Elsewhere he was held. From the forest region about Compiègne Foch made a local counter-attack, on a wide front, on June 11th, and regained some ground. Further to the right, General Pershing came into action, with the First American Divisions that were ready to take the field as an independent unit. By a series of splendid attacks, he prevented the enemy from issuing westward along the Marne from Château-Thierry; and the little town gives its name to the first victory won by the troops of the United States in the Great War in France.

All through the month of June the fighting went on. The Allies were now able to report many local gains on all the three battle fronts—in Flanders, on the Amiens front, and towards the Marne. French, British and Americans all contributed their share. The gains were

nowhere very great, but they went to show that the enemy, instead of being able to press forward, was just able to hold to the new line that he had taken up. In July came the final crisis of the tremendous battle and the turning-point of the war.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DECISIVE COUNTER-ATTACK

During the hard fighting in June, Foch is reported to have said, in reply to a question as to what he thought of the situation, that even if the battle were a mere game with no national interests at stake, he would "prefer his own hand to Ludendorff's." On one of the critical days, the reassuring statement given by the British Government in reply to a question in the House of Commons took the form of an announcement that "General Foch was perfectly satisfied with the position and the outlook."

In the anxious days of the first battle of the Marne, he had watched unmoved the forced retirement of his divisions before the attack of superior numbers, and waited patiently for the opportunity to strike the decisive blow. In this gigantic battle, that extended from Ypres to Champagne and went on for months, he was once more waiting with resolute patience for the day when he could organize and launch his decisive attack. The "preparatory stage" was still in progress.

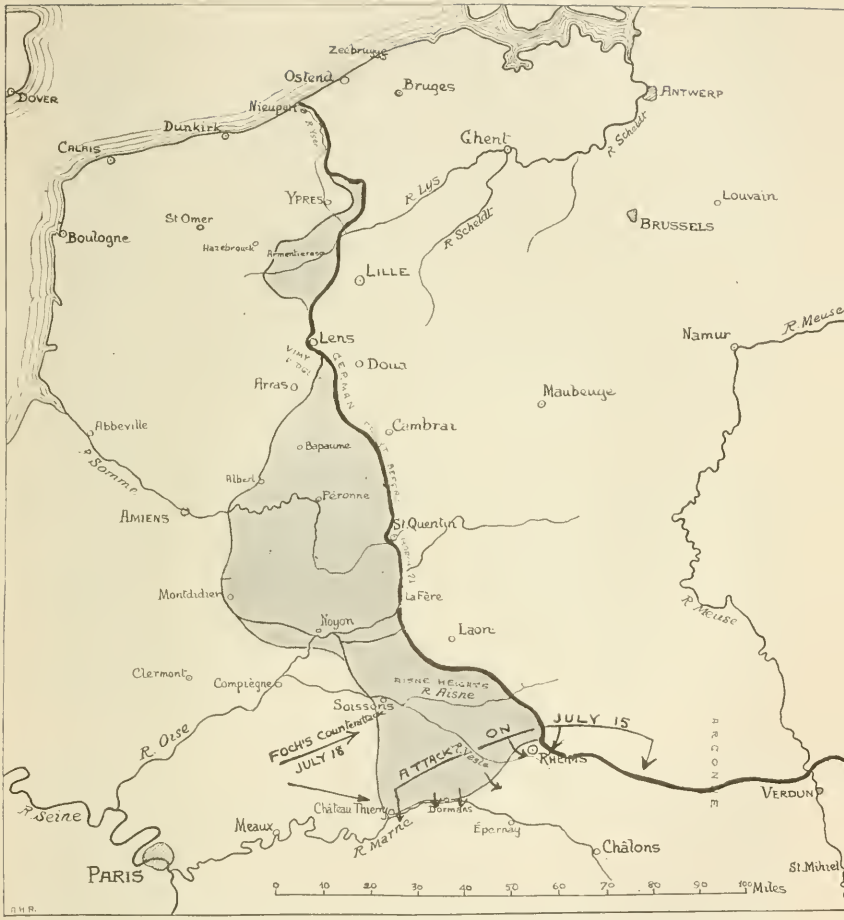
The German leaders had studied Foch's teaching, and knew well his persistent emphasis on the idea that defence could never give decisive victory, that attack was the only way to a decision. It was the fourth month of the battle. So far, Foch had made only local and limited counter-attacks. He had not even attempted the great counter-attack, that he had described in his writ-

ings as the essential stroke for success. Why was this? The inspired articles give some clue to the theory adopted as an explanation by the German staff. Thus, on July 4th, the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* wrote:

"We know, from all that has so far happened, how Foch has put in one reserve after another; his army of manœuvre, which was formerly so strong—about sixty divisions—is now used up. On the initiative of Von Hindenburg and our incomparable army depends the decision, and they will bring it about despite the much-advertised American help."

This theory, that Foch had used up his reserves in barring the repeated offensives of the German army, seemed to solve the riddle. It was proclaimed that Foch could not counter-attack in force because his reserves had disappeared, swallowed up in the long effort to keep his line unbroken against the onset of the German millions. It was a reassuring theory, and it seemed to point to a certainty of success. If Foch's reserves were gone, not only was there no danger of a counter-attack in force, but he would find it difficult to supply the reinforcements required to hold his own, in case further pressure were exerted against new points in his line. There was the fixed idea, that no American help on a large scale could yet be available for the Allies. The German staff could therefore develop its plans at leisure and even take some risks with impunity. It was a dangerous state of mind. It is always rash to underrate an enemy's resources.

The great offensive had been described in Germany as "the Kaiserschlacht,"—"the Emperor's Battle"; and "the Friedensturm," the peace offensive that was to give victory and a dictated peace. Judging from the



Map showing the German front in March 1918 before the Great Offensive; the ground won by the enemy in the three salients, (1) towards Amiens, (2) in Flanders, (3) towards the Marne; the direction of the final German effort in July; & the general situation on the eve of Foch's counterattack

course of the successive offensives, the general plan of the battle is clear enough. The French and British armies were to be separated by the push towards Amiens, and the British line itself broken by the drive towards the Channel ports. If these first operations succeeded, the British army would be partly forced back across the lower Seine, partly pushed back with the Belgians to the sea, and obliged to seek safety in a difficult re-embarkation, after which the Channel coast as far as Calais would be added to the coast fortress of the Ostend-Zeebrugge sea-front. Paris would be attacked and taken, and the French and British armies beaten in detail. It was a well-devised scheme, foiled by the stubborn defence of the Allies.

After the first check, a variation of the plan was elaborated in May, and its execution on the Aisne heights and the drive towards the Marne in the last days of that month. The rapid initial success of this attack gave the Germans a new front of about sixty miles in length, from Montdidier to Château-Thierry. It faced south-west towards Paris, and was about forty miles from the forts covering the French capital.

During the month of June and the first days of July, Foch was able to prevent any further gain of ground on this front, except a slight advance on the German right. Then, in July, came the manœuvre on the enemy's side, on which he obviously counted for a decisive result, for the Crown Prince's army was now thrown into the battle.

On July 15th, the Germans attacked on a front of about fifty-five miles, from Château-Thierry eastward along the Marne and beyond Rheims, almost up to the western margin of the Argonne forest. If this new

push had begun with a success like that achieved at the outset of the earlier attacks, the results would have been serious for the Allies. The Germans got across the Marne at several points. They tried to push in on both sides of Rheims and isolate the city. They made furious attacks on the front held by General Gouraud's army in Champagne. The Marne crossing had, no doubt, the ultimate object of extending the front towards Paris, but its primary aim was to cut off the communications of General Gouraud's army with the west. If he had given way before the fierce attack launched against him by the Crown Prince, not only would Rheims have been isolated, but Verdun too would have been cut off, as the German advance gained touch with the salient the enemy had held at St. Mihiel, since 1914. It was a supreme effort of the German command to break the French line, isolate Rheims and Verdun which could then make no long resistance, and thus prepare for a great advance on Paris, by the Marne valley and from the Montdidier-Oise line.

But in this last great push, the enemy gained only trifling ground at the outset. Foch used Pershing's troops, not only to hold the western outlets from Château-Thierry, but also to deal with and force back the German detachments that had crossed the Marne; and the Americans fully answered his expectations. Further east, Rheims, although encircled by the enemy, still kept one line open, and held out against hostile attempts to fight a way into its suburbs. Gouraud held his advanced positions very lightly, only delaying the enemy's advance at first. But after a slight gain, the Germans, now beyond the immediate help of their heavy artillery, were brought to a dead stop before a well-

prepared and strongly held line of defences. The enemy's rush was checked, and now at last Foch struck his blow.

The Germans have themselves admitted that it was quite unexpected. There had indeed been some idea that Foch might make a local attack on a rather larger scale than usual, on the American Independence Day, July 4th, or on the French National Fête, the 14th. When both anniversaries passed without any serious operation on the Allied side, the enemy were more than ever confirmed in their theory, that Foch—anxious though he might be to act up to his own theory and repel attack by attack—had only the reserves left that were necessary to keep his line intact. So on the morrow of the 15th, the Crown Prince had moved his armies to the new offensive, without any anxieties about having to parry a vigorous counter-stroke.

But Foch was by this time nearly ready to act. He had—as we have seen when examining his teaching—shown how the place for the decisive effort might be determined, amongst other things by the discovery of a weak point in the enemy's front, and by the choice of ground offering good communications for the concentration and cover by which the preparations could be concealed. In modern war, forests have acquired a new importance, for they afford good cover from the prying eyes of the airmen, and thus troops can be securely moved and massed under their leafy screen. It was quite true that by this time the Allied flying corps had obtained something approaching a mastery of the air; but no absolute dominion over those vast spaces is possible; and even if daring flyers from the German side did not penetrate far over the French front, they could

obtain, in the clear summer weather, wide-reaching views to the rear of it by high ascents near their own front. Forest cover would therefore be useful for the French concentration.

Now, between the lower Oise and the western face of the salient which the Germans had pushed towards the Marne, is a well-wooded district. Along the east bank of the Oise, the forests of Compiègne, Halatte and Chantilly, form a wide zone of woodlands. From the north and south of this range of forests smaller woods stretch out in straggling lines, and link the Oise forest zone with the far-spreading forest of Villers Cotterets, the hilly eastern margins of which are within five miles of the Soissons-Château-Thierry line.

This wooded region is well provided with good roads, and has railway connections that might have been purposely designed for the concentration of an army on its eastern front. A main line from Paris follows the Oise valley; and from junctions on the river at Compiègne, Rivecourt and Creil, three railways run eastward to a crossline that traverses the forest region about its centre. The Compiègne and Rivecourt lines run into a junction at Villers Cotterets, whence a northern line runs towards Soissons and a southern follows the Ourcq valley, parallel to the front, and throws off a branch towards Château-Thierry, finally joining up with the main line that follows the north bank of the Marne. This system of railways made it easy to arrange for the concentration, reinforcement and supply, of a large army.

Foch had gradually assembled a considerable force in this forest region. He made it the centre of his operations to hold back a German advance towards Paris,

first from the salient pushed towards Amiens, and later from the curving front of the enemy's line from Montdidier by Soissons to Château-Thierry. He had successfully repelled the enemy's efforts to penetrate into the forest margins of the Compiègne and Villers Cotterets woodlands. He now began to crowd the eastern woods with troops, as he assembled his striking force. The enemy had no idea that they had anything more than a defence force in their front, in the Viller Cotterets forests. It was thus easy to conceal the concentration, and secure the great element of surprise for the decisive attack.

The force thus assembled in secret for the "*coup de bélier*"—the "battering-ram blow"—was made up of the two armies of General Mangin and General Degoutte. Mangin, on the left, had with him not only French troops but two British divisions selected for their excellent fighting record. Dégoutte, on the right, had besides his French divisions a strong American contingent.

The weak point on the enemy's front, where the blow was meant to produce a "fissure" followed by a widespread collapse, was the Soissons-Château-Thierry line. In their efforts to widen the salient the Germans had pushed towards the Marne, to force a crossing over the river, and to break down the resistance of Rheims—they had accumulated a very large force in the salient. And they had only one good line of supply—the railway and road from Soissons to Château-Thierry. It was badly placed and dangerously exposed. It was not in the centre, but on the western edge of the salient; and the Germans had only been able to advance a few miles beyond it to the westward. A short advance of the

Allies would bring it under gun-fire. Another step forward would cut the communications of the huge force, that was crowding towards the Marne crossings.

The attack was made at daybreak, on July 18th. There was to be no long preparatory bombardment, so as to take full advantage of the surprise. "Not a sound was to be heard from the forest," writes a *Times* correspondent, "though it was teeming with men and guns. And then suddenly, at the appointed moment, as day broke, there was one roar from all the guns, and the whole front broke into activity, as men and tanks dashed forward to the attack."

At the first rush there was a considerable gain of ground. In one place the line was carried forward for five miles. Twenty villages were cleared of the enemy, and forty-eight guns and sixteen thousand prisoners taken. Next day, Friday, the 19th, further progress was gained by Mangin's army. The high ground towards Soissons was reached, and the French artillery was able to open fire on the railway. Then the German resistance stiffened, and progress was slower for awhile. On Sunday, the 21st, the French and Americans were in Château-Thierry.

Rheims was now out of danger, and General Berthelot was able to begin a series of attacks on the other flank of the German salient. Besides his French divisions, he had with him British and Italian troops. The enemy was withdrawing from the Marne. Covering his retirement by furious counter-attacks, he was making a slow retreat in the whole of the salient. On August 2nd, he had to abandon Soissons. There was a stand for a few days along the line of the Vesle, and the Germans then fell back across the Aisne.

But this was only the beginning of their retirement. The counter-attack of July 18th proved to be the turning-point of the war. The German staff were now in the position, which they had mistakenly attributed to Foch in the early days of July. In feeding their successive offensives since March 21st, maintaining the long lines of the new salients, making the last push in July and endeavouring to parry Foch's counter-stroke, they had used up their reserves. And they now realized that the American reinforcements were pouring across the Atlantic. The initiative had passed to the Allies. The Germans would have to act on the defensive.

To economize his forces by holding a shorter line, Ludendorff decided on the abandonment of the ground gained since March. Preparations were made for a withdrawal from the two remaining salients. The army of invasion was to fall back on the Hindenburg line, and hold the old line in the centre from the Aisne heights to the Argonne.

But Foch did not for even a day relax his pressure on their fronts. Hitherto, throughout the war, on both sides every offensive thrust had been followed by a long pause, while another effort was being organized. But Foch was faithful to his own teaching, that the fruits of success must be reaped by relentless pursuit. The pursuit here took the form of blow after blow launched against the German lines, now here now there, not at haphazard but with the continuous connection of purpose that gave them the character of a ceaseless organized attack on a gigantic scale.

In the second week of August, as the Germans fell back to the Aisne heights, Haig attacked, and flattened in the point of the Amiens salient, the advance of his

infantry being accompanied by the onset of a thousand tanks. After this came the double pressure of the British against the Hindenburg line front, and of the French and Americans in Champagne and the Argonne. The Aisne and Laon positions became the menaced point of another salient, hard pressed on both flanks, and threatening a Sedan on a vast scale if the German armies could not be extricated from the angle. Under this pressure the Laon region was abandoned, Haig broke through the Hindenburg line, and the Franco-American armies pushed northwards towards the Belgian frontier, menacing one of the enemy's main lines of communication with Germany.

In the first days of August, when the German retreat had only begun, but when it was already evident that July 18th had been the decisive day, the French Government decided on giving the highest honours it could award to the organizer of the victory. The title of Marshal of France had originated under the old Monarchy, and was abolished by the first Republic. Napoleon revived it, when he assumed the imperial crown; and he bestowed the marshal's baton on several of his best generals. The title was again revived by Napoleon III, to be once more abolished by the Republic that came into existence after his downfall. It had once more been restored by the new Republic and given to General Joffre as a recognition of his services on his retirement from the chief command of the French armies. On August 7th, the *Journal Officiel* published a decree of the President, promoting General Foch to the Marshalate. It was accompanied by the report of M. Clemenceau to M. Poincaré, on which the decree was based.

This official testimony to the services of the great sol-

dier ran as follows: "The decree of December 24th, 1916, revived for the first time the dignity of Marshal. I have the honour to submit for your signature, in the name of the Government (and I may assert, in the name of the whole of France) a decree conferring upon General Foch this high national recompense. At the hour when the enemy, by a formidable offensive on a front of one hundred kilometres, counted upon snatching a decision and imposing a German peace which would mark the enslavement of the world, General Foch and his admirable troops vanquished him. Paris liberated: Soissons and Château-Thierry reconquered: over two hundred villages delivered: thirty-five thousand prisoners and seven hundred guns captured: the hopes loudly proclaimed by the enemy crumbled into dust: the glorious Allied armies pushed forward in one victorious bound from the borders of the Marne to the banks of the Aisne —such are the results of a manœuvre, as admirably conceived by the Commander-in-Chief, as it was superbly executed by incomparable commanders. The confidence reposed by the Republic and all its Allies in the victor of the marshes of St. Gond, in the illustrious leader of the Yser and the Somme, has been fully justified. The dignity of Marshal conferred upon General Foch will not be merely a recompense for past services; it will consecrate still better in the future the authority of the great soldier who is called to lead the armies of the Entente to final victory."

CHAPTER XX

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

We have followed the career of Marshal Foch up to the days when, by a brilliant stroke he turned the tide of war, and France recognized his supreme services to the Allied cause by bestowing exceptional honours upon him. The judgment of the world ratified the action of the French Government. Even those against whom he fought spoke of him as one of the greatest masters of war. Since then he has done further service to his country and the Allies of France; and his successes on the Western Front have had momentous effects even in distant theatres of the war. For there can be no doubt that the defection of Germany's allies was largely due to the discouragement produced by the defeat of her armies in France and the failure of what had been proclaimed to be her final effort to obtain a decision in the field, that would have enabled her to dictate peace.

On October 4th the German Government asked for an armistice and sued for peace. On November 11th the armistice was signed and Foch issued that evening his final war bulletin:—

"In the 52nd month of a war without precedent in history, the French army, with the aid of its Allies, has consummated the defeat of the enemy. Our troops, animated by the highest spirit of sacrifice, have furnished during four years of uninterrupted fighting, an

example of sublime endurance and daily heroism. Our troops have accomplished the task which was confided to them by the Motherland, now supporting with an indomitable energy the assaults of the enemy, now themselves attacking and forcing the victory. They have, after a decisive offensive of four months, driven back, beaten and thrown out of France the powerful German army and compelled it to sue for peace.

"All the conditions demanded for the suspension of hostilities having been accepted by the enemy, the armistice came into operation to-day at 11 o'clock."

On November 25th he rode into Strasburg at the head of the French army which had marched through Alsace to the Rhine.

In France, there has always been a certain suspicion of a successful soldier, and a lurking fear that he might use his military prestige and his influence with the army for personal and political ends. Napoleon's *coup d'état* of Brumaire, that made him first the master of France and then its emperor, and his nephew's seizure of power with the aid of St. Arnaud and the army, are remembered as warnings of what might occur again. But in the case of Marshal Foch, there has never been even a shadow of such doubts. All through his life he has stood apart from politics and parties. Even the fiercest of "anti-Clericals," with all his hostility to the Church, had not the remotest idea that this earnest Catholic soldier will ever lend himself to the intrigues of either an Orleanist or a Bonapartist faction. So far as Marshal Foch has any political standpoint, it is assuredly that which Leo XIII so wisely recommended to the Catholics of France—namely a rally to the loyal support of the Republic, the abandonment of all dreams of seeking advantage for their cause from either a Royalist

or an Imperialist restoration, and the effort to secure their rights under Republican institutions by insisting on the practical application of the principles of equality and liberty to every class of citizens.

Foch has never been a politician, and has never trimmed his sails to the political policy that happened to be in the ascendant. He has simply done his duty as a soldier, and waited patiently for the promotion that would give him the opportunity of fulfilling the task, for which his life had been a long studious preparation.

He had always insisted on the two facts of knowledge and character as the essentials in the formation of the leader of men in war. His own career gives a high example of the results obtained by the faithful practice of what he taught.

A lifelong student, a teacher of exceptional genius, it has been said of him that if he were not in uniform he might be taken for a college professor rather than a soldier. His face has the characteristic features of the man of mind. The high forehead, the calm blue-grey eyes under their heavy eyebrows, tell of thought and intellect. But it is the face of a strong man, and of one strong not only on the intellectual side. The slight figure is athletic and full of energy. The whole type combines thought with action.

There is, however, no trace of *pose* about him. To use familiar expressions, there is neither "swagger" nor "side." He hates display and useless ceremonial. He is above all things a matter-of-fact worker. Calm and self-controlled, he only shows impatience in the presence of carelessness and lack of thought. One of his officers, M. Puaux, who has written a brilliant sketch

of his career, marks as one of his characteristics "*une horreur de l'à-peu-près,*" which one may translate by "a horror of careless inexactitude in talk." M. Puaux describes his questioning a staff officer, and suddenly stopping the conversation with: "Evidently you don't know. Go and find out." When practical matters have to be discussed, he speaks with a straight frankness that wastes no time in softening his own adverse criticisms with smooth words. At the back of all this is his fixed principle, that guess-work and vague information are worse than useless, and that hard facts clearly grasped are the only guide to action.

He is an indefatigable worker, and makes up his mind rapidly in the midst of action; but he has the power of seeking rest from the stress of his daily work by turning his mind to other things even at anxious times. Thus, M. Puaux tells us, that on September 9th, 1914, in the crisis of the battle of the Marne, when the Breton corps was still retiring, the centre of the Ninth Army was in danger and Grosetti's arrival to its help was strangely delayed, Foch walked up and down with one of his staff, talking not of the war but of a scientific question that had no reference whatever to it. He had given his orders and set Grosetti's division on the march, and he awaited the result of his manœuvre without giving way to anxiety.

Besides this power of detaching himself for the time being from the strain of war, Foch has always been able to economize his own energy by the studious care with which he restricts his activity to the special functions of the high command he holds. He deals with the direction and combination of operations in their broad essential lines, leaving all matters of detail to the com-

manders of the fighting fronts. This principle of command is an elementary one; but it is a point in which some of the greatest commanders have nevertheless failed. Even Napoleon, in his later years, made the mistake of trying to supervise everything; and we find him, during the campaign of 1814, when it was essential that Paris should be put in a state of defence, paralysing the local authority and causing loss of valuable time by insisting that no work should anywhere be done until the plans had been submitted to him at his headquarters in the field. Foch knew how to trust Haig, Pétain and their generals in all matters of the execution of his plans. At his headquarters, consequently, even in the busiest times, there is no elaborate office machinery required. Half-a-dozen officers work with him. Three rooms are enough for all their requirements. Thus it is that he is able to direct vast operations from a headquarters established, not in the midst of some large city, but in a little house in some small country town or village.

This fits in with the simple life he has always lived, his modest ways, his dislike of mere parade and show. Usually he has no escort. Perhaps one of his staff is with him; as often he is alone, when he goes about. He is a worker, and all his ways are of the simplest. In an age of advertisement, he shuns publicity. He has never been interviewed, and we have seen that his relations with the press during the war have been limited to a few courteous receptions, here and there, of a group of correspondents, to whom he addressed the briefest of speeches. This is why there is in his case a lack of personal anecdotes, such as are connected with the names of most public men in all countries. One writer

of a sketch of his life in a London paper could find nothing better to mention as a personal trait than that he was for years a great cigar smoker, but had lately taken to a pipe, perhaps because the war made it difficult to get his favourite cigars. For any other man of note, the journalist would have found it easy to collect a store of personal detail.

In the years before the war he used to spend his periods of leave at his Breton home, and arrange, if possible, to have his soldier son-in-law with him there. The war has made sad inroads into the little circle that used to assemble at Trefeunteuniou. His only son, Lieutenant Germain Foch, has been killed in action, and one of his daughters has been widowed.

In his writings Foch dwells upon duty and discipline as the guiding ideals of a soldier's character. They have been the guides of his own career; but no true impression of the man can be formed, unless we bear in mind that with Ferdinand Foch himself the idea of duty and discipline has a higher sanction than military tradition. From his boyhood the religion that he was taught in his Pyrenean home, and later in the Jesuit colleges, has been something not merely to be professed but to be practiced. It has been a real force in the shaping of his great career.

The faith which was that of united Christendom for more than a thousand years before the Revolution of the sixteenth century, and which in our day has more adherents than any other form of Christian belief, is assuredly, even if no higher claim is made for it, one that gives to men a clear chart by which to set their course in the voyage of life. It gives to those who accept its guidance a clearly defined rule of conduct, and plain

answers to the problems of time and eternity. Our soldiers in France and Flanders have learned something of its practical bearing upon the lives of men. For not a few of them, the crucifixes standing untouched in ruined villages or by the roadside, amid shell-torn trees, have come to be strangely impressive symbols of the faith that stands unbroken amid the storms of life. They have seen, too, peasants and townsfolk in the churches not only for a once-a-week service but at all hours of the day, and soldiers gathered round the improvised altars, on the fighting fronts, and even in the trenches themselves.

In the campaign of Lorraine and in the days of the Marne, when Foch was not at headquarters behind the war-front, but among the soldiers in the actual battle-front, he was more than once seen kneeling among his officers and men at those Masses celebrated under the open sky. At Doullens, Cassel and Frevent, day after day, he found time for the morning Mass, and in some leisure moments of the day went again to pray before the altar. On the morning of the most critical day of the fight by the marshes of St. Gond, he appealed to the chaplains for their prayers. On the eve of his last great effort, in the critical summer of 1918, he asked for the prayers of the children of France. The editor of a Catholic paper, the London *Universe,* passed on his appeal to the Catholic children of England, and was able to write to Marshal Foch that thousands of them were offering their communions for him. Amid the pressure of his work, the Marshal wrote a letter of thanks for what he described as " this great act of Faith."

On the authority of one who was with him at his headquarters we know that on the evening of July 17th,

when he had issued his final orders for the great effort of next day, he laid all work aside to find time for prayer. He had told his staff that he wished, if possible, to be left undisturbed for an hour or so. They naturally thought that he felt he needed a brief rest. But how he was spending the hour was revealed by a mere chance. A telegram arrived that required his immediate attention. He was sought for and found alone in a little chapel kneeling in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

In the minds of many men, the idea of a commander in the field, who brings religion into his daily life, is perhaps obscured by the thought of a grim Puritan soldier such as Cromwell, likening himself to the warriors of the Old Testament, and speaking of his opponents as the Amalekite and the Philistine, to be smitten with "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Or perhaps there comes the memory of a soldier like Chinese Gordon, with his erratic mysticism and his ideas of an almost personal inspiration. But for a Catholic soldier like Foch, his religion has not the grim fanaticism of the Cromwellian, nor does its clear teaching lend itself to visionary self-delusion. There is no temptation for the general in command to imagine himself a Heaven-guided leader of men. It is enough for him that he finds help in prayer, and that in times of danger the Sacraments of the Church are, for him as well as for the simple soldier in the ranks, the well-known way of preparation to face death as the beginning of a new life.

Napoleon said of his great opponent, the Archduke Charles of Austria: "He is a good man—a man of irreproachable conduct. His soul belongs to the heroic

age; his heart to that of gold." Ferdinand Foch deserves the same testimony. Or we may compare him to one of the chivalrous types of an earlier day, and describe him, like Pierre Bayard, as "the good knight, without fear and without reproach."

THE END

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